

into the new archaeological and biological framework. Information about savage peoples was fused with European folklore and prehistoric archaeology into a developmental history of mankind. In the new Darwinian context the gap to be filled was no longer between Babel and the historic nations but between natural history and history.

In formulating his account of the emergence of social and cultural evolutionism, Stocking at various points, with unflinching courtesy and some unemphasized charity, takes issue with my own account, presented twenty years ago in a book called *Evolution and Society*. Essentially, his criticism is in explaining the evolutionism of the 1860s I overemphasized the notion of a crisis in utilitarianism (though he does not discount its relevance altogether) and ignored almost entirely the more directly relevant context of Pridchardian ethnology and the polygenist-monogenist debate. I have to say, therefore, that I now think he is right. Some difference of weighting was inevitable and perhaps legitimate, in that my book began as an attempt to explore the origins of social evolutionism (with Herbert Spencer, who is clearly central to such a story but who was not related to the ethnological tradition at all, in a major role), rather than as a comprehensive study of Victorian anthropology. But the difference is relatively small, in view of the range of Stocking's book and the extent of the attention to the history of anthropology in mine, and it seems to me that Stocking has made out his case: that my own account was drastically impoverished by its neglect of ethnology (which seemed to me at the time, in its biblical and philological concerns, to have little to do with an emerging social science) and over-conditioned, probably, by an awareness of the subsequent history of British anthropology as "Social" Anthropology, with (for Radcliffe-Brown at least) its roots in Spencer; the latter is a conditioning which Stocking contrasts with his own affinity with the Boasian cultural-psychological tradition of American anthropology. Whatever the reasons, Stocking's account does now seem to me to have a historical sensitivity which my own lacked, shown above all in a less restricted range of attention and a willingness to listen to what influential voices of the time were saying, whether it makes them seem worthy progenitors of anthropology or not.

In speaking of Stocking's account of the emergence of evolutionism, though it is the core of his book, I have done the book itself less than justice. It is not a book of a single thesis, but a rich one whose accounts of the leading evolutionists are subtly differentiated and the fruit of extensive research, and whose chapters on travellers and missionaries, on the development of ethnological and anthropological institutions, and on Victorian images of the savage (pivoted on theories of primitive religion and primitive promiscuity), are admirable essays in themselves and importantly complementary to the main historical argument.

Stocking's account of the theoretical relation of anthropological evolutionism to Darwinism, too, is judicious and complex: in one sense Darwinism, together with prehistoric archaeology, came to the rescue of the Pridchardian notion of the unity of mankind by knocking away the chief supports for the polygenist case based on anatomy and physiology: given evolution there was no reason why such diversity was incompatible with common ancestry. But the polygenists too were in some sense perpetuated in evolutionary anthropology, in that racial characters could be regarded as relatively fixed – and important. Evolution destroyed the notion of a fixed hierarchy but notions of "development" could carry hierarchy in a new form. Among the characteristics of evolutionary anthropology was "the incorporation of a static racial hierarchy into a dynamic evolutionary sequence". Again, there was no direct match between Darwinism and theories of social and cultural evolution. Represented diagrammatically, as Darwin represented evolution by a tree in the *Origin of Species*, they would have looked very different. Cultural evolutionists tended to stress independent invention and unilinear advance rather than genetic relationship and divergent transmissions. Evolutionary anthropology was not a single theoretical development but a compound containing a good deal of what had

gone before: Enlightenment developmentalism, Pridchardian ethnology and physical anthropology.

Stocking's final chapters are respectively a grim epitaph to those who failed to survive their encounter with Victorian racial and developmental ideas – the Tasmanians – and a sketch of anthropology in the twentieth century, including an entertaining section on the diverse reputations of the founding fathers among their descendants. A leading theme of this final chapter is naturally the differences between the British and American traditions in anthropology. This is an important theme too

in the collection of essays in the history of anthropology, *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict and Others* collected under Stocking's editorship. Most of these, by various scholars, are studies of figures in the American tradition of cultural psychology, though two of them are about the resistance of British anthropology to it as represented by Malinowski's interest in psychoanalysis and the much lesser-known and indeed eccentric figure of the Jungian John Layard. All the essays have something of interest except the last, whose placing, and indeed inclusion, can be explained only on the assumption that the editor had a final point to



A detail from William D. Young's tinted silver print of a Swahili warrior (Kenya, circa 1900), taken from *Africa Then: Photographs 1840-1918*, edited by Nicolas Monti (77pp. Thames and Hudson. £20. 0 500 54130 2).

End of term report

Nigel Barley

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS
Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951-1982
Translated by Roy Willis
232pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £25.
0 631 14474 9
WILLIAM G. DOTY
Mythography: The study of myths and rituals
distributed in the UK by Eurospan
326pp. University of Alabama Press. £24.95.
0 8173 0269 7

The knotty problems of myth and ritual no longer lie at the heart of the ethnographic endeavour as they did in the heady days of high structuralism. Then, researchers seemed to have laid hands on a key that would unlock doors on worlds hitherto shut fast against the ethnographer, laying bare the public and private mind to relentless understanding. Those days are past. Structuralism, like the other isms, failed to deliver. Its adherents have wandered away. The smell of ultimate solutions is no longer in the air.

Inevitably, to read Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropology and Myth* is an almost antiquarian endeavour. What seemed revolutionary then, now seems like a statement of orthodoxy. Yet there is no hiding the fact that, though the facade of that orthodoxy has cracked, we now live in a post-Lévi-Straussian as much as in a post-Marxian or post-Freudian age.

The book consists of a series of annual reports made by Lévi-Strauss on his teaching at the Collège de France between 1959 and 1982, supplemented by course reports on the years 1951-60. To publish them at all is part of a public act of retirement. These reports were made after the event and so may be suspected of imposing a spurious syncretism on the firework of that ever-active mind. As might be expected of reports, they contain a certain element of self-justification. The author, torn between "arid" and "too full" of ideas, seeks poetic quality in what was the delight of some and the bane of Anglo-Saxons. Their range is vast: in content from the Holy Grail to fog; in geographical area from Indonesia to America; in time some thirty years of sustained output. They show a Lévi-Strauss who gradually un-

locks cupboard doors and rushes on, leaving others to pick through the contents that tumble out.

The reports themselves are a mixed bunch. The interest of many lies in the light they shed on the intellectual history of Lévi-Strauss himself, demonstrating early or deviant forms of ideas whose later recensions turn up in the books. They constitute a mythological field on which he draws, and the overall impression is that very little of this material has been wasted. Lévi-Strauss charts part of its subsequent history in his introduction but there are many other echoes which he leaves unmentioned or of which he is unaware.

Other essays are masterly précis of already well-known works. How many undergraduates will bother to read *The Savage Mind* and *Totemism* now that both are elegantly summarized in a mere eleven pages? On the other hand, later sections (1976-82) show the degree to which Lévi-Strauss has become obsessed with what is possibly his least original idea – the "house" as a fundamental unit of social structure. Previously unpublished material includes the Messianic "The Future of Anthropology", a tour de force with all the neat oppositions, inversions, puns and *non sequiturs* that are the hallmark of Lévi-Strauss. (The future of Anthropology can only be modelled on detailed studies of yams and the mechanics of the potter's wheel.)

In "Order and Disorder in Oral Tradition" he engages again with the history/myth, structure/event dualism that has dogged him since early criticisms were made of it and examines the structurally different accounts of the past produced by two Talmishian chiefs. In "Asidwal Revisited", he confronts critics (Mary Douglas, G.S. Kirk) of his interpretation of that well-known myth. With relentless intellectual overkill, he declares them topologically and sociologically ill-informed – worse, they cannot speak French. It is somehow overlooked that their criticisms were of method, rather than of fact.

Perhaps the most interesting essay is that on "Cannibalism and Ritual Transvestism". (Structuralism has often produced fine titles.) There have always been two quite separate Lévi-Straussian structuralisms; that of avowed method and that of actual practice. It has often

make about the historiography of anthropology and close to make it obliquely in this way.

Taken together, that is, these two volumes trace the development of anthropology from the making of confident taxonomies for "inferior" peoples, derived from biblical, physiological and philological categories, through evolutionist progressivism, to the cultural self-doubtings which have underlain twentieth-century American cultural anthropology. In terms of historiography they also in some degree embody what they describe. The "history of anthropology" is, of course, in a sense a displacement, a third-order account of a second order activity. This is particularly marked in the transition from the old, parasitic kind of "discipline history", celebrating successive conceptual conquests of a heterogeneous and exotic world, to the kind of free-standing intellectual history represented here (by Stocking with great distinction) which displaces attention more decisively from the world the anthropologists studied to "anthropology" itself, considered as an aspect of the cultures of civilized societies.

But there is a further possible recession represented by the final essay here: the last step to pure self-reference. This piece, ostensibly about anthropologists in Bali between the wars, turns out, suitably spotted with French phrases in the manner of the *fin de siècle*, to be a pretext for a modish stylistic game played by the author, a professor of anthropology and comparative literature at Cornell, with those he whimsically solicits as his "dear readers". Despite these embraces (or embarrassments) the recessiveness is perhaps even greater than he realizes; so far as this reader was concerned the author was playing only with himself. From Great Exhibition to small exhibitionist; we have travelled a long way from the mid-Victorian ambition to encompass the globe.

been a matter of some annoyance to critics that the canonical formula of myth structure "Fx(a):Fy(b) :: Fx(b):Fa-l(y)", though grandly declared, has hardly ever been used in actual myth analysis. Here, finally, Lévi-Strauss returns to it in a seminal essay that seeks to establish the formula: "woman: fellow females :: man: fellow males :: enemy: men". Though commitment to economic history, but his promise that "close reference" will be paid to the economic context is here largely met – until we get to Galbraith's own lifetime at least – by history of a very broad-brush variety. He also confesses in a disarming footnote to "a lack of motivating interest" in the writings of the German historical economists (and, presumably, their English followers) – those who have the best claim to be the first exponents of the relativist programme as applied to economic ideas.

In an earlier work, Galbraith informed us that "until the Industrial Revolution all economics was agricultural economics". On this occasion, however, the two or three hundred years of mercantile writings are not bypassed. We get through them in fifteen pages flat, after an equally breathless race through Greek and Roman thought and the Christian era. This requires some bulldozing of the territory on the way. For example, we are told that "wages had little or no part in mercantilist thought and practice", despite the fact that David Hume and Adam Smith found it necessary to devote considerable energy towards refuting their predecessors' case for low wages as a means of achieving sustained work-effort and maintaining international competitiveness.

After a chapter on the French *Economistes* (whose work Galbraith sees chiefly as a means of propping up the *ancien régime*), we arrive at Adam Smith, the beginning of the real business. Smith gave economics its modern structure because it "was given to him in turn by the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution". Acknowledgement of the inconvenient fact that "by far the greater part of the development came after [the *Wealth of Nations*] was written", pinpoints a well-known weakness in any approach that is, however uncertainly, wedded to this kind of determinism: how do we know which crucial aspects of contemporary

A gadfly's progress

Donald Winch

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH
A History of Economics: The past and the present
324pp. Hamish Hamilton. £14.95.
0 241 12388 7

The blurb on the jacket of *A History of Economics* informs us that "Nothing quite like it has been attempted before". This is far too modest: J. K. Galbraith himself has attempted precisely this on several previous occasions, not least in the extravagant series mounted by the BBC over ten years ago which eventuated in a book entitled *The Age of Uncertainty*. There one can find much of the material on Smith, Ricardo, Marx and Keynes that appears here, as well as the treatment given, in muck-raking style, to another of the author's favourite preoccupations – the American "robber barons" and their addiction to Spencerian forms of Social Darwinism. Other material from the author's recent books on money and power is also recycled. Stealing from oneself, of course, is no crime, and the obvious external debts, notably to Alexander Gray and Eric Roll, are generously acknowledged. But is this return to the scene of earlier triumphs or crimes worth undertaking for a second or third time?

As he has done in the past, Galbraith beckons the general reader, while taking out an insurance policy against adverse reviews by proclaiming that he has not overloaded his text with pesky details, unless they are diverting biographical ones. Moreover, despite repeated claims to be advancing a novel and subversive thesis, he has produced a work that is in some respects impeccably orthodox. When he departs from these conventional paths (as he frequently does), the result is more often naively wayward than stimulatingly innovative.

Galbraith purports to be dealing with "the really controlling ideas", considered not as part of some immanent process of development, but from a relativist viewpoint that sees them as "a product of their own time and place". Economic ideas are responsive to changes in economic life – albeit not without resistance of a self-serving kind from a profession that has a vested interest in the status quo. In adopting versions of this approach Galbraith's many predecessors have had a serious commitment to economic history. But his promise that "close reference" will be paid to the economic context is here largely met – until we get to Galbraith's own lifetime at least – by history of a very broad-brush variety. He also confesses in a disarming footnote to "a lack of motivating interest" in the writings of the German historical economists (and, presumably, their English followers) – those who have the best claim to be the first exponents of the relativist programme as applied to economic ideas.

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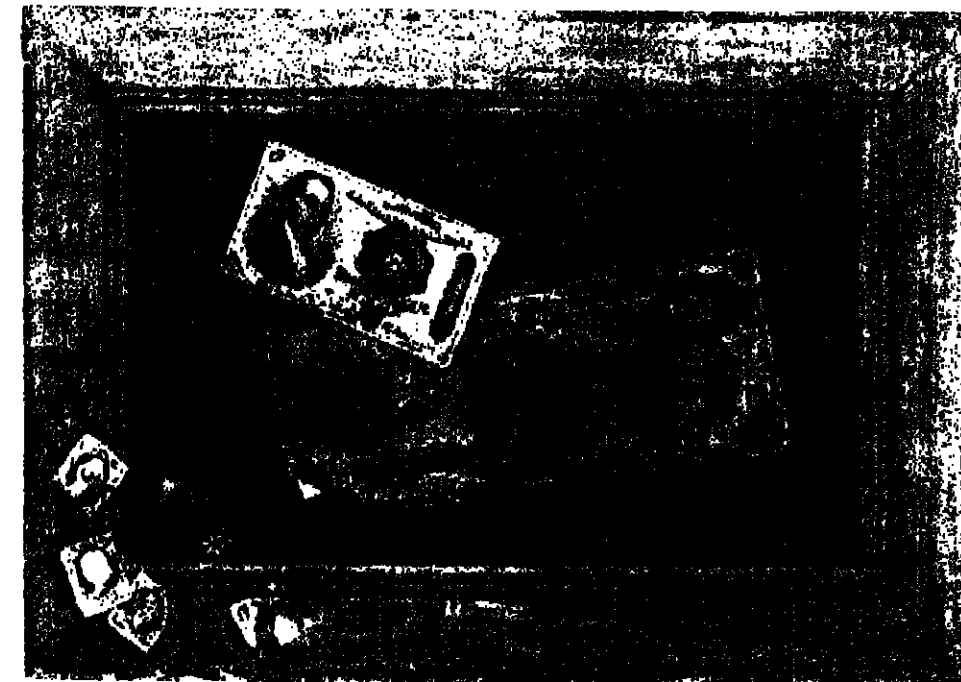
After a chapter on the French *Economistes* (whose work Galbraith sees chiefly as a means of propping up the *ancien régime*), we arrive at Adam Smith, the beginning of the real business. Smith gave economics its modern structure because it "was given to him in turn by the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution". Acknowledgement of the inconvenient fact that "by far the greater part of the development came after [the *Wealth of Nations*] was written", pinpoints a well-known weakness in any approach that is, however uncertainly, wedded to this kind of determinism: how do we know which crucial aspects of contemporary

economic circumstance dictated which responses without circular reference to the texts themselves? Bluff mention of the "status quo" or "vested interests" does not take us much further: deciding just what constitutes the status quo, what interests should be regarded as legitimate or illegitimate, has always accounted for a good deal of serious economic debate. On this matter, as on others, Galbraith is rescued from circularity and dogmatism by inconsistency. Although he subscribes to the sub-Marxian idea that "ethical judgments have a strong tendency to conform to what citizens of influence find it agreeable to believe", on other occasions he takes pleasure in pointing out that the views of economists on political and moral questions are more likely to sound like the Tower of Babel than those of well-drilled choristers singing for their supper.

Although Galbraith has always enjoyed the defensible if parasitic role of gadfly to economists he is very much an "insider" at heart, much given to what must strike any newcomer to these realms as professional gossip. Hence perhaps his difficulty in breaking away from the orthodox criteria applied by the majority of practising economists to the history of their discipline – especially the idea that any economic discourse worthy of their attention has always been autonomous, divorced from wider intellectual entanglements. Thus Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is dismissed here in one sentence on the vague yet erroneous grounds that it was "largely antecedent to his interest in political economy". Smith was, it seems, simply wasting his time when he made major revisions to this work long after he had published several editions of the *Wealth of Nations*. Such remarks, taken in conjunction with the absence of any serious treatment of those systematic political and philosophical commitments which economists have upheld, place Galbraith in the same camp as that arch-pessimist and anti-relativist, Joseph Schumpeter, who once proclaimed that "economic analysis has not been shaped at any time by the philosophical opinions that economists happen to have...". The only difference is that Schumpeter found it impossible to follow his own narrow precept.

With John Stuart Mill deemed unworthy of attention, Malthus and Ricardo become the main standard-bearers for orthodox versions of post-Smithian political economy. Galbraith repeats a few ancient *canards* centring on the irredeemable nature of mass poverty certified by Malthus's population principle, but condescendingly grants limited absolution on the grounds that: "[Malthus] was not, one judges, an unkindly man, and his mind did turn to ameliorative steps within the controlling authority of his law." One judges that Malthus would have received rougher treatment had he not also been an early opponent of Say's Law, that dragon which was finally slain by Keynes in the 1930s – the notion that aggregate supply is always capable of generating a matching level of aggregate demand.

Galbraith's most perverse, certainly his least well-argued decision is to take over, quite uncritically, Keynes's polemical definition of "classical" economics as meaning everything that was pre-Keynesian. Adherence to Say's Law thereby obliterates any of the marks which distinguish classical, including Marxian, economics from its neo-classical or post-marginalist successors. The hard core of "classical" economics thus defined can be found in theories of price formation and income distribution operating under competitive market assumptions, and hence treated exclusively as microeconomic phenomena. It follows that there could be no such thing as a classical (pre-Keynesian and non-monetarist) form of macroeconomics concerned with aggregate levels of output and employment, because Galbraith cannot allow Smith or his successors to be chiefly engaged in advancing theories of economic growth and capital accumulation (mentioned here only as the outcome of Smith's ethnic bias in favour of parsimony). Not only, therefore, are the interesting differences between the classical and neo-classical approaches to price and distribution theory obscured, but an entire macroeconomics of stable growth (or decline), within which all classical microeconomic discussion was set, has to be written out of the historical record. The contrariness of this decision is underlined when



John Haberle's "Imitation", 1887, was sold at Sotheby's, New York in May for \$517,000. It is reproduced from *Sotheby's: Art at Auction 1986-87* (448pp. Sotheby's. £27.50. 0 85667 342 0).

Galbraith argues for his own combination of macro and microeconomics later in the book.

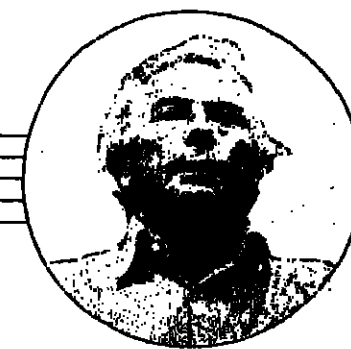
Galbraith's brief expositions make it hard for readers to grasp precisely what hard-core propositions are being attributed to most "classical" authors. Marx comes off particularly badly. Galbraith first attributes to him a theory of surplus value based on the law of diminishing marginal productivity, an idea of immaculate neo-classical provenance, and then saddles him with a distinction between the laws of production and distribution for which Marx himself ridiculed Mill, its true originator.

The familiar story of the triumph of Keynesian ideas during the 1930s and after the war enables Galbraith to call upon his memories as a partisan. After a few pats on the back to those of his contemporaries who have kept the right post-Keynesian flag flying, the book bravely fights off any sense of a dying fall. After all, wage-price inflation, the oil-price rise, the revival of monetarism and supply-side economics have destroyed a good deal of the post-Keynes-

ian consensus. Galbraith treats this partly as a result of the changing times and partly as another example of the way in which the economic self-interest of the profession, acting in concert with vested interests, has intervened to give "scenic relevance" to older orthodoxies. Hence the revival of free-market rhetoric, and the new hold exerted by the competitive market model, despite the dominance of large corporations.

The reflections contained in the later chapters, though no longer novel, are those of a seasoned campaigner in these realms. It seems a pity, therefore, that they have been burdened with a history which is largely anecdotal and even manages to pass up polemical opportunities for illustrating the author's position. When Galbraith rings the changes on the significance of the modern megacorp and its relationship to the State, he has something to say that is based on contributions he has made to our understanding. The same cannot be said of his excursions into the history of economics.

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Darkly wise, rudely great

W. B. Carnochan

THOMAS KAMINSKI
The Early Career of Samuel Johnson
 268pp. Oxford University Press. £22.50.
 0195041143
 ALVIN KERNAN
Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson
 357pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press.
 £19.70.
 0691066922
 PAUL J. KORSHIN (Editor)
Johnson After Two Hundred Years
 253pp. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; distributed in the UK by AUPG. £36.
 0812280164
 NORMAN PAGE (Editor)
Dr Johnson: Interviews and recollections
 176pp. Macmillan. £27.50.
 0333399137

We do not regularly speak of the age of Chaucer or Shakespeare or Swift or Wordsworth or Dickens or Woolf or Melville or James; none of these names is so radically imprinted on the times when the writer lived as is Johnson's on the later eighteenth century. No other period of British or American literature is so firmly in the grip of one writer as "the age of Johnson"; it has become, uniquely, Johnson's own.

Commensurate with his possession of the age is our need to possess him and to gain a purchase on history. The need to interpret and to collect Johnson strikes with peculiar violence. He is a vocation, an obsession, a cult. The priestly function of criticism is at its strongest in the worship of Johnson. I think "worship" is not the wrong word. Johnson is the messenger if not the bearer of divinity; Boswell is his assistant prophet, flawed, scandalous, necessary.

At worst, the cult produces some gawky acolytes and bitter infighting among believers who think they see the true, scriptural figure beneath the layers of commentary. At best, it produces a genuine sense of human possibilities under conditions of stress. As a mythological figure, Johnson is part Kierkegaard, part Horatio Alger. He combines get-ahead entrepreneurship with existential anxiety. Hardly surprising, therefore, that he has become the titular hero of his times; he captures the power as well as the crisis of modernity.

So, in some measure, do his best interpreters. The *Harvard University Gazette* recently reported that Walter Jackson Bate had given his last lecture in English 140b, *The Age of Johnson*: "Students, faculty members, and some former students gave the 70-year-old scholar a standing ovation garnished with tears." For thousands of students over four decades, Bate became Johnson, keeper of the sacred flame, crusty and controversial, generous, independent of mind. Bate, says the article, "considers himself to be a product of some dull teaching who was saved by the public library in Richmond, Indiana, his hometown." Lichfield and Richmond; Michael Johnson's bookshop and the Richmond public library; Johnson and Bate. Countless students, reading Johnson, hear Bate; the voices seem to be the same.

Others, no doubt, do not hear Bate but his cantankerous antagonist, Donald Greene. And probably some hear the late James Clifford, most benign of the recent, great Johnsonians. The Johnsonian landscape is full of heroic figures. Who will replace these giants from before the flood of scholarship that has washed over the land?

Thomas Kaminski seems a contender, not least because he permits himself an occasional burst of Johnsonian nonsense. Only a true believer in Johnson's language and values would describe Juvenal's Rome in this way: "The innumerable Roman virtues of justice, temperance, and courage had been vitiated by the spread of Greek manners and amusements." Translation: heterosexual Rome had been invaded by homosexual Greece. "Manliness" was a main Johnsonian virtue and was a precursor of the muscular Christianity that in the next century dominated the boarding-school habit of mind. From Samuel Johnson to Thomas Arnold, from the Club to Rugby School, is not a long

step, and from Kaminski's manly Roman virtues of justice, temperance and courage it is not far to the boyish virtues of the playing-field and the cold shower. Something rather school-boyish infects the life of the Club, with its assortment of bully boys, good citizens, hangers-on and (in North American parlance) wimps. In boarding-school, the well-being of the whole requires objects of verbal (if not physical) abuse; those are the wimps. Without them, school life would be a war of all against all. With them, hostility finds its direction and purpose. The Club could hardly have done without Gibbon; or at least Boswell could not have done without Gibbon, whose shy "infidelity" provided the biographer with a whipping-boy. It is among the conventional ironies of boarding-school that Gibbon, like others in his situation, fully subscribed to the ethic of manliness – and spent considerable energy, in the final volumes of the *Decline and Fall*, bashing the unmanly Byzantines, the decadent residue of Rome.

It is unfair to Kaminski, however, who has written a very useful book, to dwell on matters at the margin. *The Early Career of Samuel Johnson* is distinguished by its no-nonsense demythologizing; its knowledgeable placement of Johnson within the London milieu of books, booksellers and journalism; and its attentiveness to evidence. The young Johnson who emerges from its pages is a credible figure – and considerably changed from the legend, especially in the case of his friendship with Savage. Kaminski is right that those who know nothing else about Johnson's early life think they know something about his acquaintance with Savage. And some who know a good deal about Johnson have perpetuated what, on Kaminski's account, is only fiction. How many of us who teach Johnson to students have not yielded to the pathos of Boswell's story: Johnson and Savage, poverty-stricken and homeless on the streets of London. Not true, says Kaminski: Johnson could have gone home to Tetty in Castle Street, and neither he nor Savage was at the time so poor as Boswell claims. As for the letter to Cave that Johnson signed "Yours, *impransus*", probably he meant that his work, not his poverty (as Boswell supposed), had kept him from dining. Kaminski makes this argument, elegant and deflationary, in a footnote. That is tactful of him. He does not cuff Boswell to promote himself. This distinguishes him from some other Johnsonians.

It is Horatio Alger's hero, not the forerunner of Freud or Kierkegaard, who preoccupies Kaminski and Alvin Kernan also. The formula of the poor but deserving lad who begins life as a newsboy or a bootblack and goes on, after huge difficulties, to make a fortune, replicates in the capitalist world the pre-capitalist tale of the *picaresque*, the orphan who survives the warfare of the streets. In Kaminski's pages and in Kernan's *Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson*, Johnson is the *picaresque* as writer in a world being radically altered by new technologies of print and production. If the age is Johnson's, it is so in Kernan's view because Johnson so well understood what the new age required; he was both its creator and its grandest creation.

Kernan draws on Eisenstein, Darrton, McLuhan, Febvre and Martin, and others who map the modern intellectual universe around the central sun of the printing press. As an interpretation, this map has its limitations and risks. In a post-humanist, post-modern, post-everything-else age – our own – the trope of the computer as a more than human force that regulates real human lives has become routine but should not be. The computer "revolution" is taken for a fact of our natural history, not unlike its American, French and Russian antecedents. Had people in the eighteenth century spoken of a print revolution, we would have realized sooner that the very idea of such a "revolution", like print and like the computer, threatened basic assumptions about human nature. Kernan is right that the *Dunciad* assailed the printed word, though, in the medium of the printed word, but is he right that Johnson, by contrast to Pope, entirely acquiesced in the values of print, that there was "an elective affinity of Johnson and print"? That the printed book and the life of writing that print structured for Johnson gave him the foundations of the ordered and meaningful

reality that he needed to exist?"

Or was Johnson's need for order in part generated by compulsions of print; was print less the solution to the problem than a point of its origin? These questions have to do with chickens and eggs. Causes and effects intervene. But just as Romanticism has been said to be, despite its claims of transcendence, a product of the new industrial hegemony and of print in particular, so may Johnsonian humanism, despite its practical bias, be seen as a product of nostalgia for an older, better world before the invention of mass culture. Did not Johnson act out the strain between the pieties of Protestant individualism and the realities of mass production that print anticipated and represented? At times Kernan moves towards this conclusion and too fastidiously stops short. But these are matters of nuance. Writing as he does with energy and grace, Kernan is a thoughtful guide to the world Johnson lived in and helped to make.

What is best about Kernan's book is that it is up to date but not vogueish; he has assimilated new scholarship but not been overpowered by it. In Paul J. Korshin's collection, *Johnson After Two Hundred Years*, one sometimes looks for something more up to date. Most of the fourteen essays deal with specialized topics. All but one derive from a commemorative conference held at Pembroke College, Oxford, on the bicentenary of Johnson's death, and most would not have been methodologically out of place in *New Light on Dr Johnson*, published almost thirty years ago on the 250th anniversary of Johnson's birth. This will be reason for celebration in some circles, and if put to the test, I would have no trouble in voting for the solidity that many of these essays display in preference to the automatic Mod-speak (I adapt Stefan Collini's "Prodspeak", TLS, April 3, 1987) that erupts on one uncharacteristic occasion: "Johnson's *Savage* reveals and conceals the individualizing tactics through which mid-eighteenth-century cultural discourse institutionalizes the shift from a sacred to a secular form of pastoral power."

And, "because one text (con-)textualizes another which (con-)textualizes another in an infinite process of discursive re-encoding, this authority can and will be revoked over and over again". To those who might protest that the actual context (con-text?) reveals scraps of meaning here, I would answer, yes, but not enough to make the thing go down tolerably. Better "Johnson on Friendship", "Samuel Johnson and the Writing of History", or "The Theory of Language in Johnson's *Dictionary*" (to list some essays in the volume) than half-digested post-modernity. And at their solid best, certain essays – Frank Brady on "Johnson as a Public Figure" or Robert Folkenflik on Johnson's modern biographers – are very solid indeed.

Lastly, *Dr Johnson: Interviews and recollections*, edited by Norman Page, one in a series (a very expensive series, if the cost of this volume is typical), that has memorialized figures as different as Marx, Trollope and Brendan Behan. Such an undertaking in Johnson's case can only supplement or correct Boswell, whom the editor sensibly excludes. The collection gives an intermittent, unadorned sense of what Johnson – as distinct from Boswell's prettified and mythologized version – could be like at his worst. From the pages of Croker's edition of Boswell, Page exhumes notes by a Mr Wickes, said to be a draper of Lichfield, who describes walking through his garden with Johnson. Coming on an urn that he has placed there as a memorial to a friend, Wickes asks Johnson for a response, reported as follows: "I hate urns; they are nothing, they mean nothing, convey no ideas but ideas of horror – would they were beaten to pieces to pave our streets!" An expression, no doubt of Johnson's *horror vacui*, but what did poor Wickes think about this reaction to his emblem of friendship? Johnson did not always reserve his surliness, as we would like to think, for those who were more his intellectual equals than a Lichfield draper. He was not just the gruff curmudgeon; he could be truly repellent. In this he does not differ from other great, tormented writers. The cult of Johnson does its hero a doubtful service when it underplays the rough side of his nature. The real point is not that his brutishness was incidental to his greatness but that they were inextricably joined.

The needs and the nerve

Lucy Ellmann

LAURIE LISLE
Portrait of an Artist: A biography of Georgia O'Keeffe
 373pp. Heinemann. £16.95.
 0434427160
 SUE DAVIDSON LOWE
Stieglitz: A memoir/biography
 455pp. Quartet. Paperback. £6.95.
 GEORGIA O'KEEFFE
One Hundred Flowers
 Edited by Nicholas Callaway
 108pp. Oxford: Phaidon. £70.
 0714824860

One art critic discerned in Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings the desire to have a baby. Another saw signs of necrophilia. Clement Greenberg accused her of thrusting arbitrary meanings on to personal fetishes. Lewis Mumford thought her "the poet of womanhood". Judy Chicago awarded her the dubious honour of a vulval plate at her feminist megapiece "The Dinner Party", and Henry McBride, after much thought, declared that she was one of the best twentieth-century female American painters. It is hardly surprising then that Georgia O'Keeffe felt that people often misinterpreted her work – "they make me seem like some strange unearthly sort of creature . . . when the truth is that I like beef steak – and I like it rare".

In her biography of this reclusive artist, Laurie Lisle skirts around both the meat and the unconscious mind, to concentrate on the bare threads of O'Keeffe's character. Lisle is a sure if rather plodding guide, giving us the facts, from O'Keeffe's earliest memory to her final court cases. But she met the artist only once, and fails to quite rise to her 1976 challenge to biographers: "Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest." Lisle's reports of the paintings are brief and rarely to the point (only three are reproduced in her book, two of them blocked by the painter in the foreground); she seems more involved with the theme of the artist as a model of self-assertion.

In 1916, at the age of twenty-seven, O'Keeffe had one of her enviably frequent revelatory moments, when she decided that whatever restrictions the rest of life might entail, she would at least paint what she wanted to paint. The experimental pictures she produced in the following weeks are among her best, and contained the germ of all her subsequent work: the use of heightened colour and abstraction to form pictorial equivalents of sensual responses to the world. O'Keeffe rolled up these drawings and sent them to a friend in New York who in turn considered them remarkable enough to be shown to Alfred Stieglitz, the dynamic photographer whose gallery, 291, had long been the campaign headquarters of the American avant-garde.

Stieglitz is supposed to have seen in O'Keeffe's pictures "at last a woman on paper", and so their artistic partnership began. As well as her lover, Stieglitz was to become O'Keeffe's powerful advocate in the art-world, while she became his enigmatic subject for a series of his obsessional photographs. When O'Keeffe's sexually charged paintings were shown under Stieglitz's auspices, they too caused a stir, much to her dismay. Usually ill before, during, and after her shows, O'Keeffe never enjoyed exhibiting her work, or hearing its visual qualities put into words. The criticisms made of her were, in fact, laughably contradictory: flowers were too traditionally feminine to be worth painting, while man-made Manhattan could only be depicted by men. "When I entered the art world, the men weren't very happy about it. You weren't supposed to paint yellow pictures, and you weren't supposed to paint pink pictures", she wrote with typically offhand irony. But she withstood stuffiness, and ploughed on with her flowers, skyscrapers and bones despite even Stieglitz's objections.

Despite the mutual respect they offered each other, there were strains in the Stieglitz-O'Keeffe relationship. He, a gregarious intellectual, addicted to New York and the talk of his male "art d'obies", had formed his ideas in

Europe. O'Keeffe ignored Europe, and eventually New York too, preferring "the dirty parts of the world" where she sought the solitude and the subject-matter essential to her art. For many years, the pair spent their summers in the Adirondack mountains at an old farmhouse belonging to the Stieglitz clan. There, O'Keeffe weathered the periodic arrival of various combinations of in-laws, and the consequent battles over onions and garlic, which only O'Keeffe enjoyed (the battles and the onions). After some years of it, the painter began to spend more and more time in New Mexico, which more directly fed her art – "half your work is done for you", she would say of this bone-laden landscape. Lisle compares O'Keeffe's annual resumption of married life in New York to Persephone's returns to the Underworld. During her absences, Stieglitz nursed his "jealousy of a place" and formed hurtful associations with other women, which eventually led to O'Keeffe's nervous breakdown.

Having revisited many of her haunts, Lisle graphically recaptures her own impressions of places that inspired O'Keeffe: "Sometimes from the Taos highland she was able to see a half-dozen distant thunderstorms rip the summer sky at once." But, given the open tenderness and *joie de vivre* of the paintings, her understanding of O'Keeffe's personal life seems vague; there is no attempt to link the life with the work. The intriguing possibility of O'Keeffe's bisexuality is never touched on, though we learn, among other irrelevancies, that Stieglitz and Elizabeth Arden had a common interest in horse-racing. Those who prefer a zoom lens to a wide-angle should turn to Sue

Davidson Lowe's more inquisitive and witty biography of Stieglitz (first published in 1983 and now reissued in paperback) in which O'Keeffe is pushed vividly into focus.

After surveying O'Keeffe's long, ferociously active and successful life, Lisle seems curiously undecided about her status as a feminist trail-blazer. She admits that O'Keeffe strongly resented the oppression of women, but notes in her a disreputable contempt for women who devote their lives to husbands and children. She is troubled by O'Keeffe's indifference to the arrival of her doorstep of Gloria Steinem – though the painter was notoriously difficult to get along with, making Christopher Isherwood sit on her roof through a whole thunderstorm which only she wanted to watch, and always insisting on supper at 5 o'clock. O'Keeffe was rather proud of knowing what she wanted in life, but Lisle sees a negative side to this trait – she describes O'Keeffe's fury when a whole cake which she had admired in a neighbour's house was not given to her, and an occasion on which she stole a black stone from a friend's coffee table. But Lisle does not properly consider the connections between O'Keeffe's obstreperousness, and the needs, and nerve, of her art (she pointed that stone). O'Keeffe's bravery lay in her determination to paint, not in her attendance rate at National Organization of Women meetings.

Lisle's book contains other, more minor, faults. Her chronological snakes and ladders are often clumsy and unwarranted – it is 1924 before Lisle mentions the death of O'Keeffe's father in 1918; an event worthy of note since he had been the primary attachment of the painter's childhood. I also counted forty-six print-

ing errors, including a disconcerting one which gives the dimensions of a 4ft x 7ft painting as 16ft x 28ft, thus making it substantially larger than the dreadful 24ft x 8ft "Sky Above Clouds", her biggest.

"I hate flowers – I paint them because they're cheaper than models and they don't move!" said O'Keeffe in 1954, to deflect yet another bouquet from an admirer. This may have been so, but she was, in fact, incapable of painting moving, breathing creatures, and sought out the inner life in her subjects through stylizations which often ran the risk of a deadening sentimentality. Flowers proved to be the most enduring models for the extravagantly optimistic, voluptuous paintings which poured forth at the rate of one a day when she was working well. The sexuality of these paintings is overt. Emblems of ecstasy, her floral forms undulate, and their colours throb, against the favoured background of rumpled sheets. O'Keeffe's fans, like diligent dentists, are quick to find cavities, yet in her six "Jack in the Pulpits", the flower is progressively pured down to its phallic essence.

O'Keeffe appreciated exhibitions of her work mainly because they allowed her to see large numbers of her pictures together all at the same time. Nicholas Callaway's heady display of a hundred of her flower paintings similarly conveys an overwhelming sense of O'Keeffe's preoccupations, her weaknesses and her gifts, while the high quality of the reproductions preserves the texture and essential subtlety of her work. *One Hundred Flowers* is an intimate testimony to a private artist, and should probably be kept under the couch most of the time.

The shadows and the substance

Robert Snell

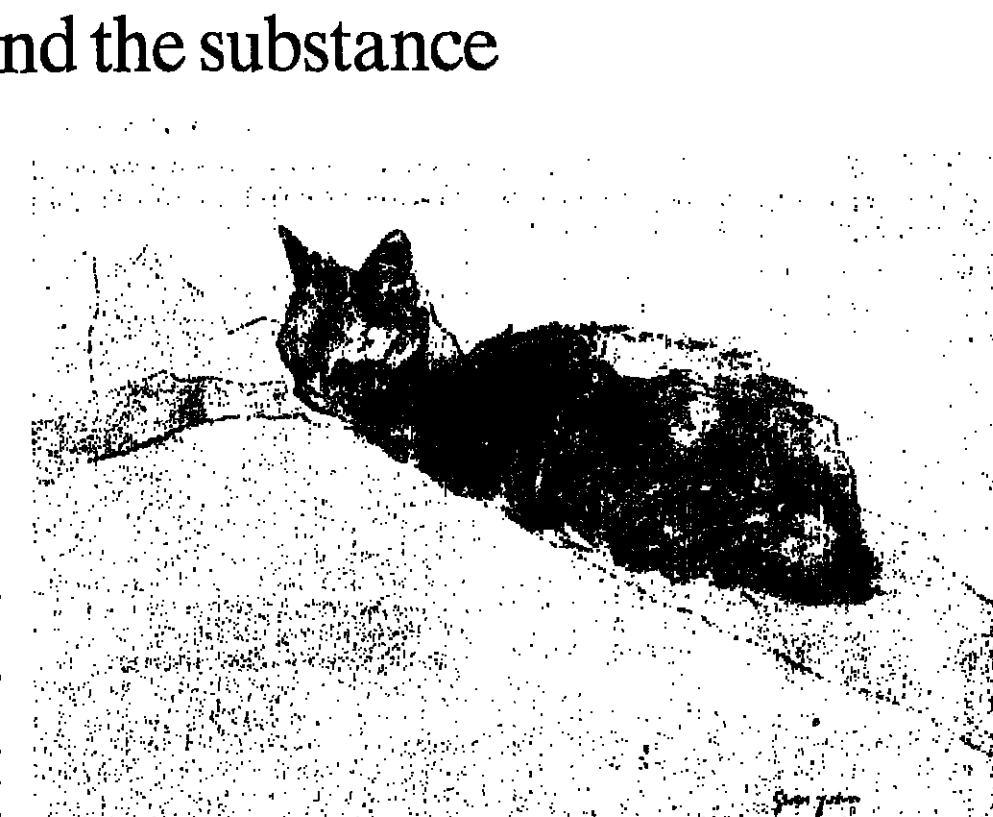
CECILY LANGDALE
Gwen John: With a catalogue raisonné of the paintings and a selection of drawings
 251pp. Yale University Press. £29.95.
 0300638682

Writing a new biography of Gwen John and compiling the John *catalogue raisonné* cannot have been easy tasks. There are tremendous difficulties of dating; John frequently repeated the same composition over and over again with only minor variations, both in painting and in drawing; the drawings seldom seem to stand in any specific relationship to the paintings. Cecily Langdale has negotiated these difficulties admirably; her main text, meanwhile, alternates chapters of biography with detailed discussion of the corresponding work, most of this discussion handled with considerable visual sensitivity. Some tenacious myths are exploded for good: Gwen John worked in rather less isolation from her peers and from the Parisian art world than has been supposed, and a significant part of her output was exhibited, discussed and purchased during her lifetime. To this extent, Langdale has written a model monograph and catalogue; but like other books of its well-established kind, it suffers from an excess of art-historical tact, reticence and self-containment.

The context which Langdale provides for her story takes the familiar form of art-historical source-finding, the noting of influences and an analysis of formative artistic experiences (the Slade and Whistler, and Augustus of course). But there is insufficient acknowledgement or discussion of more widely apprehended cultural moments through which Gwen John lived, and no attempt to deal with the fascinating and no attempt to deal with the fascinating and no attempt to deal with the fascinating

To me the writing of a letter is a very important event. I try to write what I mean exactly. It is the only chance I have for in talking shyness & timidly distort the very meaning of my words in people's ears. That I think is one reason why I am such a wall. . . . People are like shadows to me & I am like a shadow. . . . We are touched, but move on, and may thereby be missing the point of this pitiful statement. The irony is that Gwen John is now in danger of being hallowed and sanctified out of existence, not only as a member of a culture but also, once again, as an individual.

But her life's work should surely be seen as



"Black Cat on Blue and Pink" by Gwen John is reproduced from Cecily Langdale's book, reviewed here. The picture's subject is probably the same black cat depicted in "Girl with Cat" and "Girl in a Blue Apron with a Cat on her Lap" as well as in several other of John's paintings of the late 1910s to early 1920s.

known? Since Langdale has established the extent to which John's isolation from other artists and a public is a myth, she could surely have discussed the artist in terms of wider historical patterns and of "structures of feeling" too.

Perhaps the truth is that we want our Gwen John self-contained, and that the format of the art-historical monograph provides us with the perfect alibi for this. In 1901, she wrote:

To me the writing of a letter is a very important event. I try to write what I mean exactly. It is the only chance I have for in talking shyness & timidly distort the very meaning of my words in people's ears. That I think is one reason why I am such a wall. . . . People are like shadows to me & I am like a shadow. . . . We are touched, but move on, and may thereby be missing the point of this pitiful statement. The irony is that Gwen John is now in danger of being hallowed and sanctified out of existence, not only as a member of a culture but also, once again, as an individual.

But her life's work should surely be seen as

an effort to give substance to these shadows – an effort which constantly needed to be renewed, hence the compulsive repetition and reworking of her paintings. She was, I think, a woman desperately trying to stay in touch – passionately drawn to (and by) Rodin, that most tactile of modern artists – but at the same time having to maintain her guard, not to disclose too much. The characteristic late John pose – upright posture, hands folded inwards, apprehensive look – may or may not be a direct expression of this state; such speculation in itself raises important questions about the inter-relationships between individual and interpersonal psychology, and cultural forms. What about the possible functions, in this context, of those veils and skeins of paint in her later, sparsely shrouded canvases? It is worth recalling too that Gwen John finally gave up painting; her last refuge was in the Catholic Church, not in her work (in which art historians understandably tend to make their own, rather different investments) at all.

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Personal, an anthology of "contact ads" ranging through the pathetic: a deaf man has difficulty in ringing call-girls (but loves music); the laconic: "Gay man seeks gay man"; the frank: "Man of 51 would like to go to bed a couple of times with a woman of roughly the same age"; the heartfelt: "Normal woman seeks normal relation with normal man"; the resistible: "Which man between 35 and 40 would like to live and work in an Arab country together with a woman of 36 and child of 6?"; and the dodgy: "High priest working on a mystical and magical brotherhood is looking for a woman between 18 and 27 to be trained for the function of high priestess". The saddest thing is that these ads are said to be genuine; but wait, "as genuine as the persons standing behind them".

In this *galère* Alan Coren is the Thomas Mann, offering a DIY version of the Book of Genesis ("I have fashioned a rib to be thy assistant, and make the tea"), and the Prince of Darkness in business (this being legitimate on Halloween) as a marriage guidance counsellor. Another agony uncle advises a reader who asks whether it is safe, after (burning), to eat Chicken Kiev: Not in Kiev. And a timely Statement from the Board of British Humour has it that HIF pic (formerly the British Joke Corporation), once leading the field at home and abroad, is failing to keep up with current demands: there is no longer a market for the Sambo, the Big Bum, the Mother-in-Law, the What's Worn Under the Kilt, and the "lovingly crafted, hand-polished one about the deaf midget and the three-legged barnard".

And, everything being relative, E. O. Parrot's collection of brief biographies, mostly written by winners of literary competitions, is Shakespearean. "There was a jolly Miller once / Who lived in Gay Paree; / He wrote all day and wenched all night, / No one debauched as he." Daisy Ashford is pleasing on H. G. Wells: "His first job had been a very mere one in a draper's shop, but he was an ambitious man and soon rose to hire things . . . He was partial to ladies especially if they were active and pretty in the face." Far from frivolous are the entries on Betjeman and Larkin by Stanley J. Sharpless and Bill Greenwell.

"I've always been kinky for nice notepaper": and it's with the invitations that every hostess must begin. Should the party be held out in the garden or inside? Well, "the sort of party I like best can only be held behind closed doors". There's lots of downstairs and upstairs (they're not what you'd call real prostitutes, more like good-time girls) in Cynthia Payne's *Entertaining at Home*. Sliding down the banisters is naturally discouraged, but some points of etiquette are rather esoteric. Should blue films be shown at a funeral party? Well, at the right funeral, yes; you have to feel your way. And of course you need to watch the expenses: lesbians tend to come in twos, and a couple of really good striptease artistes are just as popular and more cost-effective. I suddenly realized what the tone reminded me of - this is the sort of book Sei Shōnagon might have written if she'd gone in for pillow art instead of a pillow book, and had she been humourless, not too

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intelligent, and a - a hostess. "In my book there's only one true cure for depression - sex!" In her book sex is depressing. But no doubt the wages of Cyn will still be worth having. It is with mean pleasure that one turns back to *The News Quiz* and an excerpt from Radio 4 news: "Emerging from the courtroom after being cleared of all charges, sex party host Mrs Cynthia Payne was manhandled to her car. She was obviously delighted."

The best read in the batch is a novel dating back to 1907, *The Unlucky Family*, by Mrs Henry de la Pasture, English wife of an émigré French count and then of the colonial governor Sir Hugh Clifford, and mother of the novelist who wrote as E. M. Delafield. The Chubbys, who have eleven children, are left valuable property by a relative of whose existence they were totally ignorant until they learned that he was no more. "Life is full of ups and downs in a large family", and the members of this one are outstandingly accident-prone. "Calm yourself, madam", said the Admiral soothingly. "The river running through your grounds is nowhere more than three feet deep." But some of my children are not nearly three feet high", sobbed Mrs Chubb. "Being decent people, the Chubbys share out the inheritance and live happily ever after. One reason why the book is

Through lost gardens

Christopher Lloyd

JOHN CLAUDIUS LOUDON
In Search of English Gardens: The travels of John Claudius Loudon and his wife Jane Edited by Priscilla Boniface
256pp. St Albans: Leonard, £14.95.
0 185291 000 3

THOMAS HILL
The Gardener's Labyrinth: The first English gardening book Edited by Richard Mabey
223pp. Oxford University Press, £14.95.
0 19 217763 X
URSULA BUCHAN and NIGEL COLBORN
The Classic Horticulturalist
160pp. Cassell, £12.95.
0 304 32154 0

In Search of English Gardens is John Claudius Loudon's diary of excursions made, together with his wife, Jane, through England and into Scotland between 1829 and 1842, a year before his death. These accounts were first published, serially, in *The Gardener's Magazine*, which he founded in 1826, but they have never until now appeared in book form. They run to 400,000 words and their editor, Priscilla Boniface, has had the difficult task of reducing them, for the publishers' requirements, to 55,000. We are glad to have what remains while regretting what has been omitted, for Loudon was an admirable man, caring greatly for his fellow creatures and with a mission to educate and improve them, especially in respect of matters horticultural. His criticisms of the many estates visited were without fear or favour. He caused offence on many occasions but also won respect, because, within the limits of his prejudices, he was always fair and as ready to praise as to deplore.

Loudon gives us an illuminating insight into rural life and, despite his dilacticism, the warmth of the man ensures that it is always a pleasure to be in his company. He shows a touch of naivety now and again (as when he refrains from commenting on the sculpture gallery at Deepdene because not qualified to do so) and there is even a rare intimation of humour. He tells us that

every place of entertainment from the smallest hedge-clubhouse upwards, ought to have a large garden, a library more or less extensive, a book of country maps, a road-book, a Shakespeare, a Don Juan (purified copies, of course), a newspaper, and one periodical or more.

The recommendation of even a bowdlerized *Don Juan* must suppose a lighter side. Loudon was continually indignant and articulate. His influence in the first half of the nineteenth century was immense in gardening circles and deservedly, though his tastes were partly dictated by a love of novelty, as must always be the case. We sometimes shudder where he admires.

entertaining is that it doesn't set out to be a continuous riot; and among other bonuses is Dreamy Dorothea, aged fourteen, who indites marvellously bad poetry.

The worst thing here, pipping Cynthia Payne at the post, is *Seduction Lines*, in which Sol Gordon, PhD, described as an internationally renowned psychologist and sexologist, has collected verbal advances from all over the world and coupled them with clever ways of saying nay. One or two are witty enough - "He: I promise I'll respect you in the morning. She: Good, then, I'll see you tomorrow" - but the great majority are either puerile or grindingly smutty. This doesn't of course preclude pretensions to seriousness. The publicity handout recommends the book for teenagers coming up against sex for the first time - it "can take away some of the anxiety of peer pressure", an odd way of putting it - and Dr Gordon concludes with a panegyric on masturbation, or what might be called an *Aids-mémoire*. "No one has ever died of over-masturbating . . . It's cost-effective." In that, resembling striptease artistes. The publishers have arrogated to themselves the name of the hero who brought fire to mankind.

Now, about my Christmas present. What I'd like is a brand-new, virgin sense of humour.

Unfortunately the index is woefully inadequate and the book suffers from lack of editorial comment or explanation. It is frustrating, for instance, not to be told that georgins are synonymous with dahlias or that *Araucaria imbricata* (now *A. araucana*) is the monkey-puzzle. But *In Search of English Gardens* is beautifully produced and a pleasure to handle. It is generously illustrated with supportive, near-contemporary prints and engravings of places visited, many in colour, these being integrated with the text.

Thomas Hill's book *The Gardener's Labyrinth* was first published in 1577 under the pseudonym of Didymus Mountaine, the author being very likely mindful, as the editor, Richard Mabey, surmises, of the dangers of over-exposure, for he had already published much of the same material under his own name. The present edition is based on that for 1652. Mabey makes no exaggerated claims for Hill's work and his clear-sighted introduction is the most readable part of the book. His opening sentences engender confidence: "*The Gardener's Labyrinth* was the first popular gardening manual to be published in the English language. It is not a great book, nor - at least in terms of the information it contains - a particularly original one." Hill is maddeningly repetitive and derivative, endlessly quoting ancient authorities rather than relying on his own experience. He was a fine and experienced gardener but he constantly disguises the fact, the more so as he was also an astrologer, a dream interpreter and a believer in sympathetic magic. These are millstones about the neck of a practical manual, but he was, after all, writing 400 years ago, which is of historical interest and fascinating within his context. Mabey's cataloguing and, where necessary, identifying all the plants mentioned by Hill, is helpful and the period illustrations agreeable.

The Classic Horticulturalist is a more high-sounding title than is warranted by the text. Nigel Colborn flips through a random choice of gardeners, botanists and gardening styles from Queen Hatshepsut and bar incense trees around 1500 ac (where would the garden history student be without Queen Hatshepsut?) to some of the recently dead, Ursula Buchan follows with fifty A-to-Z (A to V, actually) descriptions of plants associated with some of the worthies mentioned above; but also with others that were not, together with historical and cultural notes. Her writing has great facility but is sometimes monotonous; a kind of *periphrastic* mobile is established. Surely she was half asleep when she wrote, of crocuses, "Mice eat the combs underground; if they are a major problem, traps can be set."

The book's design is good and the pages pleasing to turn over, with some illustrations, such as *Dahlia coccinea*, glamorous. In others of the parrot, the areas of solid colour are so breaky that, but for their shape, the flowers would be unrecognizable.

Improving greenery

Patrick Bowe

E. CHARLES NELSON and EILEEN M. MCCracken

The Brightest Jewel: A history of the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin
275pp. Clifden: Boethius, £30.
0 863 14 083 1

The history of the botanic garden at Glasnevin has as much to offer to the social historian as it does to the garden historian, which indicates, perhaps, why the authors of *The Brightest Jewel* have chosen to base their book on successive administrations of the garden rather than on the plant collections and on their development.

From their beginnings as adjuncts to hospitals, through their subsequent role as part of university institutions to their establishment as independent bodies committed to botanical and horticultural research, the role of botanic gardens in society has continued to change. This evolutionary process is evidenced by Charles E. Nelson and Eileen M. McCracken in their long account of the controversy surrounding the foundation of the Glasnevin garden - there were marked disagreements between those who desired the new garden to be attached in the traditional way to the medical faculty of the University of Dublin and a progressive party who wished to see it established as an autonomous institution. It is even more forcibly demonstrated in a note at the beginning of the book informing us that, as it was being printed, authority for the garden was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Office of Public Works, so linking it with the network of Ireland's National Parks - a change which underlines the garden's diminishing role as an agricultural and horticultural research centre and its increasing function as a place dedicated exclusively to the study of ornamental plants.

Histories of long-established and official institutions are, in the main, formal grand exercises in public relations. But in *The Brightest Jewel* the strong, and often difficult, personalities of the garden staff are described with relish; their machinations in the pursuit of career advancement are recorded; prolonged rows over the direction of the garden's development are recounted. Indeed, Nelson and McCracken show that these problems sometimes worked to the advantage of the garden, as in the case of the suite of greenhouses known as the curvilinear range, which exhibits a remarkable unity of effect despite the fact that it was built in a series of interrupted operations over a period of twenty-five years by two different contractors with the advice of three different architects.

Nelson and McCracken's account of the battle to open the garden on Sunday is also good. This proposal, bitterly opposed by those who wished to keep the Sabbath holy, was made on behalf of the working classes, who, it was thought, might wish to visit the garden on their only day off. Six thousand signatures were gathered against it, but a petition of 16,000 signatures in favour, together with strong government support ensured the success of the plan. The government provided a police sergeant and six constables to patrol the grounds every Sunday; and, despite the fact that there were over 15,000 visitors on one Sunday alone, not only did the expected unruliness not materialize, but the local police magistrate reported that the incidence of Sunday drunkenness had, as a direct result of the new facility, declined.

Ruth Isabel Ross's *Pocket Guide to Irish Wild Flowers*, with illustrations by Greg Moore (71pp. Belfast: Appletree, £3.95, 0 86281 192 9), describes eighty flowers, including a few bushes, with full-colour facing illustrations. They are arranged, in each season, alphabetically by English names, with botanical names given too, and often Irish ones: Streang bogha, wild partners Restharrow, while Pis bhuilhe denotes a Pea more clearly than either Meadow Vetchling or *La thyris pratensis*. Since many of the flowers are common in Great Britain, the guide is handy, with its flexible and waterproof cover. In the other isle also

Regional receipts

Alan Davidson

GERALDENE HOLT
French Country Kitchen
294pp. Penguin, £6.95.
0 1404674 6
CÉLINE VENCE, SUE LERMON and SIMON MALLLET (Editors)
Cuisine du Terroir: The lost domain of French cooking
250pp. Blenheim House, 3 Blenheim Road, Deal, Kent CT14 7AJ, £14.95.
0 9512121 09

French Country Kitchen and *Cuisine du Terroir* are as different as, say, a croissant and a supermarket sandwich loaf. Geraldene Holt presents a personal collection of recipes based on the time she has spent in several parts of France, especially the Ardèche. Her style is unpretentious but skilful; all the recipes are placed in context, and there is a charming, companionable air about her work. *Les Recettes du Terroir des Maitres Cuisiniers de France*, originally published in French in 1984, aims to be comprehensive (it covers twenty-eight culinary regions), pooling the knowledge of the 300 *maitres cuisiniers* (a majority of whom are noted as having made contributions to the book) and their "research into traditional French domestic cooking, in order to record and perpetuate an important but receding part of culinary history". This sounds like a worthy aim, but it is unclear what the authors have been researching, and how they organized their research.

Take Provence, for example: among the eight Provençal recipes included are those for Aioli, Rouille, and Bouillabaisse. But these are hardly a receding part of culinary history, since they are very much present today. So, have the master chefs explored older and more "authentic" versions of these dishes than those currently available? Perhaps, but their methods are not explained nor are we told how far back they thought it expedient to go. There is no bibliography so it is tempting to suppose that the chefs have explored oral traditions, questioning the elderly. But this is not stated, and since one recipe is declared to originate in

the fourth century ac, some more far-reaching technique must have been used. Or (and this seems the most plausible explanation) we are simply being told how these distinguished cooks think the dishes are best made.

Stripped of historical pretensions, and treated as an authoritative collection of French recipes, the book has some attraction. But it is little more than recipes. The introductions to the various regional chapters are brief, often just lists of well-known products and dishes of the region. And there is one surprising inaccuracy - the repetition of the myth that the range of small rockfish needed for bouillabaisse exists only in Provençal waters, "between Martigues and Toulon"; in fact they have a wide distribution throughout the Mediterranean.

If one compares the English version with the French original (now conveniently available at a remaindered price in Paris), one discovers that the mistake about the fish is not in the French text, in which it is merely remarked that small rockfish do not travel well. The introductions to the chapters in the French edition are much longer, containing interesting details which the English editors have lopped away ("slightly abridged", they say, but reducing three or four pages to one is more than "slightly").

In contrast, Geraldene Holt is outstandingly readable. Particularly enjoyable is her chapter on "The Olive".

On the last Saturday in July, in Nyons, ten men dressed in white, their green waistcoats trimmed with red, raise trumpets to their mouths and a fanfare echoes across the square to announce the start of the olive festival.

She then goes on to explain why the olives of Nyons are so good. "The Chestnut, Almond and Walnut", which begins with Robert Louis Stevenson's night on a ledge in a chestnut grove, is another memorable chapter. Holt's prose is enhanced by Alan Barlow's drawings, and she is careful, too, to give references, where appropriate. It is strange that an English author, writing informally and from her personal experience, should provide an interesting bibliography, while hundreds of French master chefs, approaching their task in an official and solemn manner, omit to provide one.

Breakfates, Lunger, Diener

Keith Jeffery

ALISON ARMSTRONG
The Joyce of Cooking: Food and drink from James Joyce's Dublin
252pp. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, \$18.95.
0 930794 85 0

Books of recipes with literary associations are becoming something of a minor genre. At the serious end of the market Jane Grigson's *Food with the Famous* stands unchallenged. Less scholarly volumes have been based on Jane Austen and Lord Peter Wimsey, and there is, of course, the matchless *Pooh Cook Book*. In this collection based on the works of James Joyce - an excellent idea - Alison Armstrong has included recipes which would have been familiar to Irish cooks circa 1904 and some more modern inventions prompted "in a spirit of fun" by Joyce's writing. A few are borrowed from the James Joyce Pub in Zurich where "Bloom's Breakfast" comprises fried sliced kidneys flavoured with sage and Cognac. Miss Armstrong's own recipe for this dish is more authentic, yet even she accommodates the fastidious modern palate by indicating a method to remove the "fine tang of faintly scented urine" from the kidneys. In the same vein (as it were), here is juggled without any blood, although a recipe for "hearty" sausages begins with "one quart fresh pig's blood, salted". Leopold Bloom's addition to "the inner organs of beasts and fowls" is well catered for: nutty gizzards, stuffed roast heart, thick gilet soup and mouldy tripe are all included.

Among the more exotic flights of fancy in the volume are Scared Cat's Face Glided in Marmalade, Sherman's Tongue with Black Cherries in Nougatine and Turko the Terrible Turkish Delight Sherbet. These betray, perhaps, the book's American provenance, as do some

of the fancy additions to "traditional" Irish dishes. Yorkshire Pudding (sic) includes sliced shallots and chopped parsley and there is generally a superabundance of garlic. This is not in itself undesirable. Joyce, indeed, may very well have acquired a Continental taste for the plant, but the Plain People of Ireland would, even today, be astonished and horrified to discover their Prime Rib of Mullingar Beef studded with slivers of fresh garlic.

Still, a book which gives us witty Joycean dishes such as Buck Mulligatway Soup, Barnacle Goose Oughterard and Home Rule Sun Rising Up Out of the Northwest Soufflé should add some merriment to meal-times: "Breakfates, Lunger, Diener and Souper". But while the volume may appear to be a joke, it is one with an apparently serious conclusion. Not content to let the recipes stand alone, the author in a final chapter ventures "the possibility of a phenomenological psychoanalysis of food or at least a 'sketch toward a theory' of an existential psychoanalysis of food choices". While not excluding the possibility that this is some sort of satire, it is a little indigestible and spoils the rest of Miss Anderson's culinary jest: in sum, a New York-Dublin arty joke.

The House of Commons Cookery Book (144pp. Century Hutchinson, £9.95, 0 7126 1813 9), compiled by Charles Irving and containing "150 favourite recipes" contributed by Members of Parliament, is a book for semioticists rather than cooks. In addition to such obviously significant dishes as Beef Well-salted, Leopold Bloom's addition to "the inner organs of beasts and fowls" is well catered for: nutty gizzards, stuffed roast heart, thick gilet soup and mouldy tripe are all included.

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The 10th Lord Cobham and his family, by an unidentified artist, 1567; one of many illustrations to a chapter on "Eating & Drinking" in *A Country House Companion* by Mark Girouard (192pp. Century Hutchinson, £14.95, 0 7126 1654 3). Girouard uses extracts from letters, journals and memoirs to provide a brief survey of the dining habits of the land-owning classes, from the Middle Ages to what is clearly his favourite period, the early years of the twentieth century. There are general observations on the unchanging importance of meat and drink ("It was a sign of status for an individual to be served with more food than he or she could conceivably eat"; "one mind-boggling menu and household accounts ('of loaves of bread there were consumed 3333; of meat, 22,963 lbs'); and reminiscences of the Quality: Consuela Vanderbilt on leftovers for the poor at Blenheim, Georgiana Sitwell on afternoon tea, picnics with Lady Lansdowne, Harold Nicolson on the Edwardian breakfast ("A little kedjree, Lady Maude?"; "Oh thank you, Mr Suppleton"). Other chapters use the same anthology method on "Love, Lust & Marriage", "Parties", "Royal Visits", "Servants", "Plumbing, Or the Lack of It" and "Birth and Death".

Futurist food

Elizabeth David

SHELAGH AND JONATHAN ROUTH (Editors)
Leonardo's Kitchen Note Books: Leonardo da Vinci's notes on cookery and table etiquette
173pp. Collins, £12.95.
0 00217165 1

Poor Leonardo. It was only a few months ago that somebody claimed to have established as fact that the Mona Lisa was actually a mirror image of the artist himself. Now along comes Jonathan Routh, noted spoofster, with what purports to be a newly discovered Leonardo manuscript containing recipes, menus, and designs for kitchen machinery. There is talk of Leonardo's nouvelle cuisine and details of Joyce novelities, the likes of a rolled anchovy lying on top of a slice of turnip carved in the image of a frog, two half-herkins upon the leaf of a lettuce, the testicle of a sheep in cream (cold), a gigantic wedding cake (hollow, and large enough for people to sit inside) made of solid blocks of porridge reinforced with nuts and raisins and covered in multi-coloured marzipans, Pope Leo X's metre-long sausage served with a bunch of carnations. Not so much nouvelle cuisine, rather more Marinetti's futurist food of the 1930s, his mortadella with nougat, his pineapple with sardines, and the meals to be eaten to the accompaniment of warmed perfumes - the bald-headed were to be safeguarded from the cold - sprayed over the diners who would wield forks in their right hands, stroking meanwhile with the left some suitable substance such as velvet, silk, or emery paper, according to mood. Jonathan and Shelagh Routh have Ludovico Sforza, Il Moro, Leonardo's patron in Milan, tethering beribboned rabbits to the table so that after eating he can wipe his dirty fingers on their fur. Wasn't the three-pronged fork invented by Leonardo, the Rouths then speculate? but abandon that subject for more fruitful fun.

"Green beans from Tesco" slip easily into a list of raw foods, a reference to Jerusalem artichokes somehow predates the arrival of those tubers in Europe by the best part of a century, a recipe for steak and kidney pie is disguised as "mbed cow pie" and includes "grated testicle for interest", and one for eggs, bacon and fried bread is written in mock archaic language and called pig with egg and bread. "You place the alithers in a pan but

lightly smeared with oil and on the flames do place it." Battered Fish with turnip fingers is fish and chips, with turnips standing in for the potatoes which would be too obvious an anachronism.

At this stage I was reminded of that supposed diary of an eighteenth-century farmer's wife written in language so preposterously bogus that you wondered how a ten-year-old could have been taken in by it, let alone the responsible publisher who apparently took it as a genuine record and loosed it as such on the public, not all that long ago. The author of the phoney diary was, I believe, amazed to find her innocent effort taken for genuine (she had written it for a radio series), and Mr and Mrs Routh, while scarcely innocents, certainly have no deceitful intent. Their book is a schoolboy's prank (publication date was April 1), a squib which now and again achieves a mild fizz. The illustrations include a few of Leonardo's own designs with mischievous captions. A lighthouse - or is it a watchtower? - becomes a pepper mill, fearsome engines of war make their entrances as kitchen gadgets such as spiral crushers and watercress cutters; a spiral staircase is "Leonardo's design for a left-handed corkscrew", a geometrical pattern becomes a device "for inflating an egg with bellows so that it can be split into three equal parts". Hilarity in the dorm.

Supplementary illustrations, showing kitchen utensils, are reproduced from the famous plates in Bartolomeo Scappi's cookery book published in 1570, a half century after Leonardo's death, and aren't acknowledged to that work, any more than are two full-page plates from an earlier book, Cristoforo di Messisburgo's *Banchetti* of 1549. A double-page spread showing a procession of Vatican stewards, cooks and butlers carrying large Shaker-type boxes slung on poles and containing - presumably - hot dinners for delivery to the cardinals in conclave during the election of the pontiff in 1566 is acknowledged to Scappi, but is captioned as depicting "the way that a meal was served at the Sforza court in Milan". A long way from the Vatican, Milan.

Authors as diverse as Walter Pater and Kingsley Amis, Jane Austen and Ernest Hemingway, Melville and P. G. Wodehouse are included in *Feasts*, Christopher Bland and Linda Kelly's anthology of notable meals from literature (266pp. Constable, £12.95, 0 09 467760 3).

NB

Ivory institutes

John Sutherland

On September 15, the University of California announced to the press that the Irvine Campus had been selected out of the five competing to be the site of its new "Humanities Institute". It adds one more to around fifty such "Research Centres" sponsoring pure scholarship, particularly in English, the heart of humanities. These institutes radically reshape the American academic's notion of the ideal career. It is now feasible to spend substantial periods cushioned by NEH or Guggenheim grants and stipendiary-residential years at Institutes of Advanced Research. If one produces to form, by one's middle age an endowed or "distinguished" chair should be in prospect. A professorship, that is, entailing few burdensome teaching duties (perhaps some graduate seminars), no administrative chores, a salary comparable with that of a British GP and generous funds for travel, research and conference attendance. And in the ripeness of years, the mature scholar will generate his own "programs" and with any luck may even head his own institute. In British terms, this looks suspiciously like a lifetime's sabbatical. But, of course, no such career is available in the British system. Metaphorically what the grant-glutted American profession now offers is the academic equivalent of hydroponic agriculture: cultivation by pure, inorganic nutrient free from all the messiness of dirt farming.

The great attraction of Humanities Institutes is that they can make their selections on just one criterion: is the candidate genuinely brilliant? University departments interviewing for new members of staff have to juggle a whole bundle of conflicting criteria: is the candidate clever? Is he/she so clever that we'll look ordinary? How will he/she fit in with tenured colleagues? How good a teacher is he/she? Are we observing our Equal Opportunity (she/he) and Affirmative Action (she/she) obligations? Amid all this, the merely brilliant scholar can be filtered out as too flaky, too selfishly career-oriented or just not nice enough to live with for longer than a year.

There was intense rivalry between the five California campuses for the honour of housing the new Institute. In the last round Irvine apparently slugged it out with Santa Barbara. By traditional standards, neither would seem the logical choice since neither has an outstandingly good library as, for instance, the also-rans UCLA and Berkeley have. But books are no longer the thing. It is "theory" that now dominates, and theory travels very light. A well-lighted seminar room, some yellow notepads, glowing minds and a lot of dollars will do it. Where Irvine scored, was that it had recently acquired the services of such luminaries as J. Hillis Miller, Jacques Derrida and Wolfgang Iser, scholars who have helped revolutionize literary studies. And for the past twenty years it has had in its English department Murray Krieger - a scholar who was hyper-theoretical before it was fashionable to be even mildly theoretical. (Krieger, incidentally, is to be the Institute's first director.) It was its scholarly neon which had put Irvine up with Duke (who currently boast Stanley Fish, Fredric Jameson, Annabel and Lee Patterson, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Frank Lentricchia) as the leader among literature departments.

In his 1986 Presidential address to the Modern Language Association (published in *PMLA*, May 1987) J. Hillis Miller rides off into the West with the air of one leaving the front line for a spot of well-earned rest and recuperation. His generation has achieved what Miller calls the "triumph of theory in the United States". It must now be left to a younger band of Americans to consolidate the advance. Miller foresees the future in frankly imperialist terms. "Although literary theory may have its origin in Europe, we export it in a new form, along with other American 'products', all over

The Anglo-Hellenic League's annual prize of £1,000 is for a literary work about Greece. Works of fiction, drama, travel, current affairs history, biography, the arts or antiquity are eligible.

the world - as we do many of our scientific and technological inventions, for example the atom bomb." In defiance of etiquette Miller names the sixteen young theorists whom he expects to make the running over the next decade.

There are two features of Miller's oration, symptomatic of the current American academic situation and entirely alien to that in the United Kingdom. The first is his conviction that the study of letters is advancing. And it is being advanced by the direct theoretical discussions of American (or American-salaried) academics. It is this exhilarating and chauvinistic sense of going somewhere that explains the excitement of the new and vital critical movements in the States. "New Historicism" and "New Pragmatism". There is a strong feeling of destiny; the hour of the American critic has come. A recent appointment to the Duke Fish-tank is reported to have declared in all seriousness that if a bomb dropped on North Carolina "it would put literary theory back a hundred years". Where would one drop such a bomb in the UK? The truth is, there is no such imperial centre of intellect. Moreover, the ideology of the British academy - fostered by Arnold, Eliot and Leavis - is more one of desperate preservation than the aggressive exportation of literary theory.

The other characteristic feature of Miller's speech is that he is putting together what is vulgarly called a "hot list" - that is, a ranking of the most currently valuable academic properties. It is probable that Miller's presidential endorsement added thousands of dollars to the market value of these lucky sixteen. Since American salaries are not capped or nationally sealed as they are in the UK, the sky is the limit. In a market where colleges compete to buy star names, the top-ranked literary critic has the privilege for which the American football players were recently striking: namely, free transfer to the highest bidder. And bids are getting higher all the time.

All this accompanies a "humanities" crisis in the United States, as urgent (if one is to believe the newspapers) as the missile-gap crisis of the 1950s or the pollution crisis of the 1970s. Modish alarm about the condition of humanities is reflected by the success of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and E. D. Hirsch's jeremiad *Cultural Literacy*, which have occupied the top slot of the *New York Times* bestseller list in succession. Quick to respond, scientific establishments like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have put new emphasis on what is called "humanistic" science. One is told that several big companies are sending their most promising young executives back to college for a year to study philosophy or music. And the University of

Shadrach, Meshach and Ian Paisley

Tom Paulin

The act of reading is social, though it is often presented as solitary and personal, part of one's development as an individual. Over the years I've noticed how a certain type of narcissistic criticism will tell you the exact time and place when he or she was first bowled over by a particular text whose pages smelt like fresh bread or old wicks. Unwrinkling my own novel I can't determine what exactly the weather over Belfast was like some time back in the 1950s when I was first told the story of Daniel. At primary and Sunday school I must have learnt chunks of it off by heart, and this wasn't so much the apparently personal act of reading and rereading a text in order to memorize it, as the experience of being read into a narrative which is part of the tribal myth of the Protestant community in Ulster.

For many years afterwards, the Book of Daniel was simply the repository of a few hackneyed phrases - "the hand den, feet of clay, the writing on the wall." I sometimes invoked the classroom cadence of *Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego*, but otherwise I never re-read or thought about the text from which it came. Then in November 1985 I read a speech by a loyalist leader - Ian Paisley - which attacked

California took pains to present its Irvine Institute as the "centerpiece of a 'Humanities Initiative' for the nine-campus UC system".

The crisis has a number of sources, some more openly discussed than others. The primary cause for concern is the demonstrable fact that (despite the allure of American "theory") the highest-scoring students on the nationwide Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) are not majoring in Humanities, but are instead choosing law, medicine or hard science careers. This, together with a gross drop in Humanities PhDs awarded, forecasts a drastic shortfall and deterioration of "humanities practitioners" in the mid-1990s. One of the main aims of institutes such as that at Irvine is to burnish the image of Humanities so that it will recruit a fair share of the best minds in the future as it has in the past.

A less easily articulated factor is the growing oriental element in American intellectual life, particularly on the West Coast where a new so-called "Pacific Rim" culture is emerging. In the best California schools, American students of Asian origin nowadays represent some twenty to thirty per cent of the undergraduate body. Asian-Americans (sometimes referred to unprejudicially as the "New Jews") are extraordinarily adaptive to the American way of academic life and have duly received the accolade of a *Time* cover story ("Those Asian-American Whiz Kids", August 31, 1987). Indeed, they have been so successful that in some quarters the yellow peril reflex has been triggered. The University of California at Los Angeles was last year accused by civil rights groups of running a clandestine quota system by which qualified Asian applicants were being excluded. Asian students (unlike their Jewish predecessors) are commonly thought to show little enthusiasm for "soft", unvocational subjects like English literature and American history. (Or for team sports like football, which was one reason that UCLA was said to be worried about the influx.) "Humanities" is thus a code word for a Western European and white American heritage that must redefine itself or go under.

I how all this will work itself out is not clear. But for those who remember the late 1960s, current events have their irony. Following a dramatic politicization of the student body, the call then was for "relevance" and social utility. The ambitious young academic of those days saw himself going forth like Mao's barefoot doctors to minister to the people. The point about the new Institutes and the new Humanities initiative is that they mark a return to "pure" scholarship, and social relevance be damned. The ivory tower has made its comeback, as we knew it would. Let them eat theory.

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the Anglo-Irish Agreement and ended with the defiant statement: "Like the three Hebrew children, we will not budge, we will not bend and we will not burn."

I opened my copy of the Authorized Version and read the Book of Daniel with that intense concentration which is like a type of underwater recognition. Here was a story which viewed the act of reading - as, like the critical act of interpretation - as central to social life; a story of "peoples, nations and languages" that related hermeticities to state authority, political power to nationhood. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was Britain in post-imperial confusion, Daniel was the loyalist imagination that sits "in the gate of the king" and is trapped in an imperial time-war. But who were the three Hebrew Children?

I discovered that in the Apocrypha there is a series of verses which was inserted between verses twenty-three and verse twenty-four of Daniel chapter three. This passage is known variously as "The Song of the Three Holy Children", the "Prayer of Azariah", the "Hymn of the Three", and in it Azariah witnesses from the burning fiery furnace. Significantly this canticle is used at least days in the Roman Catholic scriptural canon (it appears in the Jerusalem Bible as part of Daniel). I can only imagine

In brief

During recent celebrations at Edinburgh University for the 150th anniversary of the death of that most pessimistic of Italian poets, Giacomo Leopardi, the Italian ambassador was presented with a commemorative volume from the University Press of his *Canti*, translated into English, Gaelic and Scots by eight Scottish poets, Douglas Dunn and Iain Crichton Smith among them.

At a discussion with some of the translators, Alistair Mackie claimed that his working-class background and chronic depression gave him insight into Leopardi's "darkness of the spirit". Douglas Dunn quoted approvingly Lowell's description of Leopardi as one of the first of the "heart-breaking" poets but thought his pessimism "unattractive". Samuel Beckett clearly does not agree. He chose Leopardi's line "*E fango è il Mondo*" - "the world is filth", (but translated at the conference by erstwhile professor of English at Glasgow University, Edwin Morgan, as "the world's but a clart") as epigraph to his 1931 monograph on Proust.

★ ★ ★

Ogonyok, perhaps the most radical of the recently revitalized Soviet journals, has just astonishingly published an interview with Anna Larina, the seventy-six year old widow of Bukharin. The leader, who was executed in 1938, has become the centre of an historical debate currently raging in Moscow over the question of rehabilitating figures condemned (and most often killed) during the height of the Stalinist purges.

In the interview, Anna Larina, who until now has had no public existence, discusses childhood memories of Lenin and Stalin (she was practically a child when she married), Bukharin's character, their courtship, and his final days.

"Lenin arrived at my father's office", she recalls. "Bukharin had just left. Although I didn't understand everything that was being said, it was clear they were discussing him. One phrase I remember was 'Bukharin is the darling of the Party.' Later she tells the story of delivering a love letter to Bukharin. "As I ascended the stairs to the second floor I suddenly and unexpectedly came across Stalin, and understood that he was on his way to Bukharin. I asked him to pass on my letter, and he of course agreed. So in this way - by a vicious turn of fate - my first love letter got to Bukharin through Stalin." The new journalistic openness which the interview exemplifies will be discussed in NB next week by Boris Kagarlitsky.

why a loyalist leader should instinctively cite it. The three "children" are in fact young men - Ananias, Azaria and Misael - who are commonly known by their Babylonian designations as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Reading their song - a song full of self-laceration and grief - I understood with a fascinated awe something of what the loyalist community must be feeling in the aftermath of the Agreement. It was a very complicated and disturbed emotion that seemed part of me as I read these verses.

For we, O Lord, are become less than any nation, and be kept under this day in all the world because of our sins. Neither is there at this time prince, or prophet, or leader, or burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, or place to sacrifice before thee, and to find mercy.

Nevertheless in a contrite heart and an humble spirit let us be accepted.

Revisiting the Book of Daniel under the pressure of a particular social crisis, I was able to glimpse some of the deepest images and anxieties in the political unconscious of the loyalist community. The rereading of the text was a revolutionary experience that continues to fascinate me. Truly, the Good Book is full of very good books. I count myself lucky to have grown up in a community that still thinks they're worth reading and interpreting.

Letters

Educational Reform

Sir, - It would be a pity if readers of *Adrian Wooldridge's* useful contribution (December 4-10) to the current education debate were to be put off by his first sentence. It is clearly untrue to say that "until recently educational reform in Great Britain was almost a Labour party monopoly". During the present century - Mr Wooldridge's conception of "recently" is naturally not the same as mine - the three major Acts have been the Conservative government Act of 1902, the Fisher Act and the Butler Act. The Fisher Act was the work of a Liberal minister in the Lloyd George coalition in which Labour had a very nominal representation by that time. The Butler Act was the work of the Churchill wartime coalition and an agreed measure between the parties.

It would be truer to say that Labour's interest in education, beginning with the revolt against selectivity in the 1960s, is relatively recent. The interesting question is why this should have been so and why, as Wooldridge rightly points out, the nub of its policies should have been the drive towards comprehensivization, with all the undesirable consequences that this has entailed. In so far as Labour was interested in

education - and here in the inter-war period, R. H. Tawney was the dominant figure - it was less interested in content than in greater equality of access. There was nothing wrong with what Winchester offered - it was just that the way to such education was barred by lack of finance. Some progress along these lines was possible and was made, but clearly not enough to avoid the waste of ability inherent in under-educating those who could make good use of better opportunities.

The "national efficiency" movement, with its accent on science and technology, made little appeal to Labour at the time - and makes little now. The reason is perhaps an obvious one. If one believes that the strength of the national economy is important, and that it depends upon keeping abreast of modern methods of production, the case for more technical education on the model of other countries is unanswerable. But Labour thinking was not much concerned with production - only with the juster distribution of its fruits. Hence Labour was content to see the technical school provisions of the 1944 Act wither and die.

Labour was more open to the nostrums imposed upon it by the influx of "teachers" and "lecturers" into its post-war ranks in the House

of Commons. Not the national interest but maximum choice for the individual child - self-expression not sums; not the spur of emulation and competition, which would inevitably reveal differences of ability, but enforced equality of outcomes. Not "engineering" but "social engineering" of the "anti-racist science teaching" kind.

The Conservative Party has now come round to putting the national interest, and hence science and technology, high among its considerations in framing educational policy; but like Mr Wooldridge, I question whether a combination of parent power and the market can do the trick.

What is clear is that improvements to the Education Reform Bill will have to come from the Conservative side; the Labour Party has not moved an inch from the dogmas of the past thirty years.

BELOFF,
House of Lords, London SW1.

Sir, - How pleasant, that Adrian Wooldridge of All Souls should recognize the need for philosophical reflection on the aims of education, and even endorse Alasdair MacIntyre's nostalgia for "an educated public - a public trained in moral philosophy, committed to intellectual activity and vigorous in practical affairs" (December 4-10). How poignant, that he should ridicule "a polytechnic" for having "one of the largest philosophy departments in the country" and producing graduates in "non-marketable disciplines". How ugly, that he should accuse us of "academic snobbery" and imply that the desperate straits in which we fight for the survival of our discipline are conditions of enviable luxury.

JONATHAN RÉE,
Faculty of Humanities, Middlesex Polytechnic, All Saints, White Hart Lane, London N17.

Australian Poets

Sir, - My memory played me false when I named Blake Morrison as the distinguished young poet critic who was misguidedly dismissive of A. D. Hope's achievement (November 27-December 3). The distinguished young poet critic who was misguidedly dismissive of A. D. Hope's achievement was, in fact, Christopher Reid. Blake Morrison merely commissioned the review in which Christopher Reid made his misguidedly dismissive remarks, and indeed Morrison, last year in the *London Review of Books*, wrote about A. D. Hope with proper respect and appreciation. Could you ask your readers, who no doubt treasure their every copy of the *TLS*, to substitute "Christopher Reid" for "Blake Morrison" throughout the early part of my long article?

I should also have pointed out that Carcanet will publish Les A. Murray's new book *The Daylight Moon* next February. With only ten shopping months to Christmas, it should be much in demand as a stocking-filler.

CLIVE JAMES,
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ROBERT CRAWFORD,
Verse, Department of English, The University of Glasgow.

The winner of the 1987 Collins Religious Book Award is *God of Surprises* by Gerard W. Hughes, published by Darton, Longman and Todd.

The Oxford Illustrated Dickens

Sir, - Peter Rowland is correct in his surmise (Letters, December 11-17), and I agree with him too. Heron Books is to be congratulated on - uniquely, I think - reprinting Dickens's *Miscellaneous Papers*. I much regret having done Oxford University Press an injustice, but one of its editorial staff abetted me by doing her firm the same injustice. When preparing my contribution to these pages, I telephoned the Press, explaining the point that I intended to make in the *TLS*, and asked for confirmation that this edition would be, as the advance publicity implied, a straight uncorrected reprint of the Oxford Illustrated Dickens, and I was told that this was the case.

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PHILIP COLLINS,
26 Knighton Drive, Leicester.

'Tomorrow was War'

Sir, - Lesley Chamberlain should not be allowed to grind her axe on everything about the presentation of Boris Vassiliev's *Tomorrow was War* (Letters, November 27-December 3). I shared the disappointment of your reviewer, Sally Laird, with this routine play and production, which seemed to me to convey little of the resonance it might have had for Russian audiences. But I have to say that many people around me in the circle at the performance Miss Chamberlain describes were visibly more convinced and moved that I was, and rose spontaneously at the end in a standing ovation which I could not join.

The same happened for the Royal Dramatic Theatre from Stockholm in June and the Ninagawa Company from Japan in September, both of whom, I thought, genuinely merited such a reception (and I do not assume that the many persons in dinner dress in the stalls the night I saw the Ninagawa *Macbeth* were drafted in by Japanese finance houses to guarantee good audience response).

Standing ovations and flowers are not so rare in London as Miss Chamberlain believes, though it is fair to say that, for some inscrutable reason which would be worth speculation, English audiences rise to them for visits from foreign performers more often than they do for their own. It is not fair of her to generalize so broadly in order to belittle a distinguished foreign company, however uninspiring the play. And had she listened more carefully, she could have tested her Swedish with the foyer announcements in that language for the Dramaten's *Hänsel and Gretel*.

ALAN BROWNJOHN,
2 Belzire Park, London NW3.

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Ivory institutes

John Sutherland

On September 15, the University of California announced to the press that the Irvine Campus had been selected out of the five competing to be the site of its new "Humanities Institute". It adds one more to around fifty such "Research Centres" sponsoring pure scholarship, particularly in English, the heart of humanities. These institutes radically reshape the American academic's notion of the ideal career. It is now feasible to spend substantial periods cushioned by NEH or Guggenheim grants and stipendiary-residential years at Institutes of Advanced Research. If one produces to form, by one's middle age an endowed or "distinguished" chair should be in prospect. A professorship, that is, entailing few burdensome teaching duties (perhaps some graduate seminars), no administrative chores, a salary comparable with that of a British GP and generous funds for travel, research and conference attendance. And in the ripeness of years, the mature scholar will generate his own "programs" and with any luck may even head his own institute. In British terms, this looks suspiciously like a lifetime's sabbatical. But, of course, no such career is available in the British system. Metaphorically what the grant-glutted American professor now offers is the academic equivalent of hydroponic agriculture: cultivation by pure, inorganic nutrient free from all the messiness of dirt farming.

The great attraction of Humanities Institutes is that they can make their selections on just one criterion: is the candidate genuinely brilliant? University departments interviewing for new members of staff have to juggle a whole bundle of conflicting criteria: is the candidate clever? Is he/she so clever that we'll look ordinary? How will he/she fit in with tenured colleagues? How good a teacher is he/she? Are we observing our Equal Opportunity (she/he) and Affirmative Action (she/he) obligations? Amid all this, the merely brilliant scholar can be filtered out as too flaky, too selfishly career-oriented or just not nice enough to live with for longer than a year.

There was intense rivalry between the five California campuses for the honour of housing the new Institute. In the last round Irvine apparently slugged it out with Santa Barbara. By traditional standards, neither would seem the logical choice since neither has an outstandingly good library as, for instance, the alumnus UCLA and Berkeley have. But books are no longer the thing. It is "theory" that now dominates, and theory travels very light. A well-lighted seminar room, some yellow notepads, glowing minds and a lot of dollars will do it. Where Irvine scored, was that it had recently acquired the services of such luminaries as J. Hillis Miller, Jacques Derrida and Wolfgang Iser, scholars who have helped revolutionize literary studies. And for the past twenty years it has had in its English department Murray Krieger - a scholar who was hyper-theoretical before it was fashionable to be even mildly theoretical. (Krieger, incidentally, is to be the Institute's first director.) It was its scholarly neon which had put Irvine up with Duke (who currently boast Stanley Fish, Fredric Jameson, Annabel and Lee Patterson, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Frank Lentricchia) as the leader among literature departments.

In his 1986 Presidential address to the Modern Language Association (published in *JMLA*, May 1987), J. Hillis Miller rode off into the West with the air of one leaving the front line for a post of self-enclosed retreat and seclusion. His generation has achieved what Miller calls the "triumph of theory in the United States". It must now be left to a younger band of Americans to consolidate the advance. Miller foresees the future in "frankly imperialist terms": "Although literary theory may have its origin in Europe we export it in a new form, along with other American products, all over the world - as we do many of our scientific and technological inventions, for example the atom bomb." In defiance of etiquette Miller names the sixteen young theorists whom he expects to make the running over the next decade.

There are two features of Miller's oration, symptomatic of the current American academic situation and entirely alien to that in the United Kingdom. The first is his conviction that the study of letters is advancing. And it is being advanced by the direct theoretical discussions of American (or American-salaried) academics. It is this exhilarating and chauvinistic sense of going somewhere that explains the excitement of the new and vital critical movements in the States, "New Historicism" and "New Pragmatism". There is a strong feeling of destiny: the hour of the American critic has come. A recent appointment to the Duke Fish-tank is reported to have declared in all seriousness that if a bomb dropped on North Carolina "it would put literary theory back a hundred years". Where would one drop such a bomb in the UK? The truth is, there is no such imperial centre of intellect. Moreover, the ideology of the British academy - fostered by Arnold, Eliot and Leavis - is more one of desperate preservation than the aggressive exportation of literary theory.

The other characteristic feature of Miller's speech is that he is putting together what is vulgarly called a "hot list" - that is, a ranking of the most currently valuable academic properties. It is probable that Miller's presidential endorsement added thousands of dollars to the market value of these lucky sixteen. Since American salaries are not capped or nationally scaled as they are in the UK, the sky is the limit. In a market where colleges compete to buy star names, the top-ranked literary critic has the privilege for which the American football players were recently striking: namely, free transfer to the highest bidder. And bids are getting higher all the time.

All this accompanies a "humanities" crisis in the United States, as urgent (if one is to believe the newspapers) as the missile-gap crisis of the 1950s or the pollution crisis of the 1970s. Modish alarm about the condition of humanities is reflected by the success of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and E. D. Hirsch's jeremiad *Cultural Literacy*, which have occupied the top slot of the *New York Times* bestseller list in succession. Quick to respond, scientific establishments like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have put new emphasis on what is called "humanistic" science. One is told that several big companies are sending their most promising young executives back to college for a year to study philosophy or music. And the University of

California took pains to present its Irvine institute as the "centerpiece of a 'Humanities Initiative' for the nine-campus UC system".

The crisis has a number of sources, some more openly discussed than others. The primary cause for concern is the demonstrable fact that (despite the allure of American "theory") the highest-scoring students on the nationwide Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) are not majoring in Humanities, but are instead choosing law, medicine or hard science careers. This, together with a gross drop in Humanities PhDs awarded, forecasts a drastic shortfall and deterioration of "humanities practitioners" in the mid-1990s. One of the main aims of institutes such as that at Irvine is to burnish the image of Humanities so that it will recruit a fair share of the best minds in the future as it has in the past.

A less easily articulated factor is the growing oriental element in American intellectual life, particularly on the West Coast where a new so-called "Pacific Rim" culture is emerging. In the best California schools, American students of Asian origin nowadays represent some twenty to thirty per cent of the undergraduate body. Asian-Americans (sometimes referred to unprejudicially as the "New Jews") are extraordinarily adaptive to the American way of academic life and have duly received the accolade of a *Time* cover story ("Those Asian-American Whiz Kids", August 31, 1987). Indeed, they have been so successful that in some quarters the yellow peril reflex has been triggered. The University of California at Los Angeles was last year accused by civil rights groups of running a clandestine quota system by which qualified Asian applicants were being excluded. Asian students (unlike their Jewish predecessors) are commonly thought to show little enthusiasm for "soft", unvocational subjects like English literature and American history. (Or for team sports like football, which was one reason that UCLA was said to be worried about the influx.) "Humanities" is thus a code word for a Western European and white American heritage that must redefine itself or go under.

How all this will work itself out is not clear. But for those who remember the late 1960s, current events have their irony. Following a dramatic politicization of the student body, the call then was for "relevance" and social utility. The ambitious young academic of those days saw himself going forth like Mao's barefoot doctors to minister to the people. The point about the new Institutes and the new Humanities initiative is that they mark a return to "pure" scholarship, and social relevance be damned. The ivory tower has made its comeback, as we knew it would. Let them eat theory.

Shadrach, Meshach and Ian Paisley

Tom Paulin

The act of reading is social, though it is often presented as solitary and personal, part of one's development as an individual. Over the years I've noticed how a certain type of narcissistic critic will tell you the exact time and place when he or she was first bowled over by a particular text whose pages smelt like fresh bread or old socks. Unwrinkling my own navel I can't determine what exactly the weather over Belfast was like some time back in the 1950s when I was first told the story of Daniel. At primary and Sunday school I must have learnt chunks of it off by heart, and this wasn't so much the apparently personal act of reading and revealing a text in order to memorize it, as the experience of being read into a narrative which is part of the tribal myth of the Protestant community in Ulster.

For many years afterwards, the Book of Daniel was simply the repository of a few hackneyed phrases - "the lions' den", "feet of clay", "writing on the wall". I sometimes savoured the classical cadences of *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego*, but otherwise I never read or thought about the text from which it came. Then in November 1985 I read a speech by a loyalist leader - Ian Paisley - which attacked

the Anglo-Irish Agreement and ended with the defiant statement: "Like the three Hebrew children, we will not budge, we will not bend and we will not burn."

I opened my copy of the Authorized Version and read the Book of Daniel with that intense concentration which is like a type of underwater recognition. Here was a story which viewed the act of reading - ie, the critical act of interpretation - as central to social life; a story of "peoples, nations and languages" that related hermeneutics to state authority, political power to nationhood. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was Britain in post-imperial confusion, Daniel was the loyalist imagination that sits "in the gate of the king" and is trapped in an imperial time-war. But who were the three Hebrew Children?

I discovered that in the Apocrypha there is a series of verses which was inserted between verses twenty-three and verse twenty-four of Daniel chapter three. This passage is known variously as "The Song of the Three Holy Children", the "Prayer of Azariah", the "Hymn of the Three", and in (C) Azariah witnesses from the burning fiery furnace. Significantly this canticle is used at feast days in the Roman Catholic church and is not regarded as being outside the scriptural canon (it appears in the Jerusalem Bible as part of Daniel). I can only imagine

why a loyalist leader should instinctively cite it. The three "children" are in fact young men - Ananias, Azaria and Misael - who are commonly known by their Babylonian designations as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Reading their song - a song full of self-laceration and grief - I understood with a fascinated awe something of what the loyalist community must be feeling in the aftermath of the Agreement. It was a very complicated and disturbed emotion that seemed part of me as I read these verses:

For we, O Lord, are become less than any nation, and be kept under this day in all the world because of our sins.

Neither is there at this time prince, or prophet, or leader, or burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, or place to sacrifice before thee, and to find mercy.

Nevertheless in a contrite heart and a humble spirit let us be accepted.

Revisiting the Book of Daniel under the pressure of a particular social crisis, I was able to glimpse some of the deepest images and anxieties in the political unconscious of the loyalist community. The rereading of the text was a revolutionary experience that continues to fascinate me. Truly, the Good Book is full of very good books - I count myself lucky to have grown up in a community that still thinks they're worth reading and interpreting.

In brief

During recent celebrations at Edinburgh University for the 150th anniversary of the death of that most pessimistic of Italian poets, Giacomo Leopardi, the Italian ambassador was presented with a commemorative volume from the University Press of his *Canti*, translated into English, Gaelic and Scots by eight Scottish poets, Douglas Dunn and Iain Crichton Smith among them.

At a discussion with some of the translators, Alistair Mackie claimed that his working-class background and chronic depression gave him insight into Leopardi's "darkness of the spirit". Douglas Dunn quoted approvingly Lowell's description of Leopardi as one of the first of the "heart-breaking" poets but thought his pessimism "unattractive". Samuel Beckett clearly does not agree. He chose Leopardi's line "E *jango e il Mondo*" - "the world is filth", (but translated at the conference by erstwhile professor of English at Glasgow University, Edwin Morgan, as "the world's but a clart") as epigraph to his 1931 monograph on Proust.

* * *

Ogonyok, perhaps the most radical of the recently revitalized Soviet journals, has just astonishingly published an interview with Anna Larina, the seventy-six year old widow of Bukharin. The leader, who was executed in 1938, has become the centre of an historical debate currently raging in Moscow over the question of rehabilitating figures condemned (and most often killed) during the height of the Stalinist purges.

In the interview, Anna Larina, who until now has had no public existence, discusses childhood memories of Lenin and Stalin (she was practically a child when she married). Bukharin's character, their courtship, and his final days.

"Lenin arrived at my father's office", she recalls. "Bukharin had just left. Although I didn't understand everything that was being said, it was clear they were discussing him. One phrase I remember was 'Bukharin is the darling of the Party.' Later she tells the story of delivering a love letter to Bukharin. "As I ascended the stairs to the second floor I suddenly and unexpectedly came across Stalin, and understood that he was on his way to Bukharin. I asked him to pass on my letter, and he of course agreed. So in this way - by a vicious turn of fate - my first love letter got to Bukharin through Stalin." The new journalistic openness which the interview exemplifies will be discussed in NB next week by Boris Kagarlitsky.

Letters

Educational Reform

Sir, - It would be a pity if readers of Adrian Wooldridge's useful contribution (December 1-10) to the current education debate were to be put off by his first sentence. It is clearly untrue to say that "until recently educational reform in Great Britain was almost a Labour Party monopoly". During the present century - Mr Wooldridge's conception of "recently" is naturally not the same as mine - the three major Acts have been the Conservative government Act of 1902, the Fisher Act and the Butler Act. The Fisher Act was the work of a Liberal minister in the Lloyd George coalition in which Labour had a very nominal representation by that time. The Butler Act was the work of the Churchill wartime coalition and an agreed measure between the parties.

It would be truer to say that Labour's interest in education, beginning with the revolt against selectivity in the 1960s, is relatively recent. The interesting question is why this should have been so and why, as Wooldridge rightly points out, the nub of its policies should have been the drive towards comprehensivization, with all the undesirable consequences that this has entailed.

In so far as Labour was interested in

education - and here in the inter-war period, R. H. Tawney was the dominant figure - it was less interested in content than in greater equality of access. There was nothing wrong with what Winchester offered - it was just that the way to such education was barred by lack of finance. Some progress along these lines was possible and was made, but clearly not enough to avoid the waste of ability inherent in under-educating those who could make good use of better opportunities.

The "national efficiency" movement, with its accent on science and technology, made little appeal to Labour at the time - and makes little now. The reason is perhaps an obvious one. If one believes that the strength of the national economy is important, and that it depends upon keeping abreast of modern methods of production, the case for more technical education on the model of other countries is unanswerable. But Labour thinking was not much concerned with production - only with the juster distribution of its fruits. Hence Labour was content to see the technical school provisions of the 1944 Act wither and die.

Labour was more open to the nostrums imposed upon it by the influx of "teachers" and "lecturers" into its post-war ranks in the House

of Commons. Not the national interest but maximum choice for the individual child - self-expression not sums; not the spur of emulation and competition, which would inevitably reveal differences of ability, but enforced equality of outcomes. Not "engineering" but "social engineering" of the "anti-racist science teaching" kind.

The Conservative Party has now come round to putting the national interest, and hence science and technology, high among its considerations in framing educational policy; but like Mr Wooldridge, I question whether a combination of parent power and the market can do the trick.

What is clear is that improvements to the Education Reform Bill will have to come from the Conservative side; the Labour Party has not moved an inch from the dogmas of the past thirty years.

BELOFF.
House of Lords, London SW1.

Sir, - How pleasant, that Adrian Wooldridge of All Souls should recognize the need for philosophical reflection on the aims of education, and even endorse Alasdair MacIntyre's nostalgia for "an educated public - a public trained in moral philosophy, committed to intellectual activity and vigorous in practical affairs" (December 4-10). How poignant, that he should ridicule "a polytechnic" for having "one of the largest philosophy departments in the country" and producing graduates in "non-marketable disciplines". How ugly, that he should accuse us of "academic snobbery" and imply that the desperate straits in which we fight for the survival of our discipline are conditions of enviable luxury.

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ALAN BROWNJOHN.
2 Belsize Park, London NW3.

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COMMENTARY

Coexisting with geometry

Christopher Green

Fernand Léger: The Later Years
Whitechapel Gallery, until February 21

Fernand Léger, like Le Corbusier, is a name which, for many, instantly shots into place alongside a simple, clean-cut notion of the machine aesthetic. Léger's paintings are thought of, typically, as the more-or-less faithful simulacra of a precision ideal of the machine.

The exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery begins with a row of figure-paintings presenting female figures as strange, plant-like organisms cultivated in tight clusters. To one side is a picture featuring, on a flushed orange ground, tree branches treated like a disembodied musculature; alongside this is a painting of holly leaves, glossy green against white. Plant-life borrows the qualities of the human figure: the human figure those of plants. These paintings date from the years 1930-2. They, like almost all the works on show, have little to do with the machine aesthetic, at least in the narrowly rationalist form that it was given in the early 1920s. The last major exhibition of Léger in London was the Tate Gallery's *Léger and Purist Paris* held seventeen years ago, when the presumptions of Modernism in both painting and architecture were rarely questioned. Since then the dominant view of Léger, as of Le Corbusier, has centred on Cubism, Purism, and above all, the 1920s; such a view has little to do with the Léger of the "later years", which is the topic of this splendid sequel.

Also in the first section at the Whitechapel is a painting of 1934 in which Léger pairs the crisp, angular structure of a fence or hurdle with the sturdy figures of two acrobats, one male, one female. Léger called it "Adam et Eve" and saw its larger, later variant (1935-9) along with the huge "Composition avec deux perroquets" (also 1935-9) as the major opening statements in what was to become a campaign for the revival of "great subjects" in

modern painting. The first man and the first woman are certainly as far from the machine aesthetic as tree branches or holly leaves, and Léger's explicit espousal of the theme implies one's awareness of the distance between his later work and his first maturity in the 1920s. For, again like Le Corbusier, his shift of attention towards the "natural" went with a shift of attention towards a certain ideal of the primitive: humanity before the Fall, man and woman before the "First Machine Age".

In the summer of 1931 Léger joined Le Corbusier at Le Piquey in the Basain d'Arcaillon to live the life of a drop-out in the fishermen's shacks on the water's edge, out of reach of the railway (though not of cars). Both hoped that a more "natural" way of living (however part-time) would result in a more "natural" art, in touch with the basics. In 1936 the two showed their own figure compositions alongside "primitive" artefacts. This idealization of the primitive and the natural did not mean, as Iva Conzen-Meairs suggests in her catalogue essay, that the technological was to be altogether dismissed; it signified the development of an ideal of coexistence, in which the coolest pragmatic virtues of the industrial world were brought into contact with and set off by nature. The implication was that a fundamental harmony could be found between the mechanical and the natural, the civilized and the primitive, a harmony to which there was an obligation to aspire. Adam and Eve coexist with geometry (the fence or hurdle); the works on show at the Whitechapel centre on such confrontational pairings.

This less predictable, more pluralist Léger, dedicated to the restoration of "the great subject" is, of course, altogether more appropriate to the 1980s than the Léger of the machine aesthetic. Peter de Francia's monograph of 1983 was perhaps the first effective attempt to reconstruct the artist's image by shifting attention away from his *rappel à l'ordre* of the 1920s to the later years, especially the period between 1936 and his death in 1955; the Whitechapel exhibition consolidates what de Francia began, and does so with real panache.

It may lack the enormous mural-scale *chefs d'oeuvre* towards which Léger directed his greatest efforts, but the case it makes for a reassessment is, however, persuasive in the sheer *clat* of its selection. The "objects in space", the "figure-as-object", "Les Plongeurs", the American landscapes, "Les Loisirs", "Les Constructeurs", "La Parade du cirque", "La Partie de campagne", all the major later themes are here in powerful, compelling forms.



Fernand Léger, "Femme et Enfant", 1950, from the exhibition reviewed here.

Léger has memorable things to say about trees. There is in particular a passage in his writings where he eulogizes the expressiveness of trees and poignantly recalls plane trees felled by the wind: "horrible, demonic like massacred animals: some of them were bellowing". Léger's point in this passage, however, is to underline his conviction that subjects of such eloquence are beyond the range of the painter. "How," he asks, "could one give them more

expression than they already have?" The question of subject-matter and of eloquence in painting must figure in any reassessment of Léger for it involves the further question of realism. The works at the Whitechapel address a fairly specific set of notions but they are also statements in a continuing debate about realism.

The debate as such, from its beginnings in the exchanges between Aragon and Léger in May 1936, cannot, of course, be read on the walls of the exhibition. Neither are Léger's most effective attempts to work for a mass public to be seen here (they did not, after all, lie in enamel-painting); but the catalogue does much to fill the gap, with important articles by Judi Freeman, Sarah Wilson and Simon Willmoth. (192pp, with 90 colour plates, Whitechapel Art Gallery, Paperback, £14.00 85488 074 7.)

The paintings on the walls are strong enough to say a great deal by themselves, and what they can say, at least within the realism debate, is amplified by the coincidence of the Diego Rivera exhibition at the Hayward Gallery. Another focus of the debate since the 1930s has been the heroic social realism of the Mexican mural painters. To visit the Whitechapel after the Hayward is to become aware of a whole range of refusals embodied in Léger's *nouveau réalisme*. Most obvious is the refusal to which I have referred of the dramatically eloquent subject: he avoided allegory, narrative, explosive action, explicitly "political content", propaganda, the cult of historic personalities and at the same time the supportive consistency of structural symmetry and perspective. What he chose to paint were people as types, broad themes (work and leisure), the figure-as-object, the object-as-object; and his straightforward modes of representation always worked within a Modernist aesthetic of spatial, formal and colouristic invention. His subjects were rarely more than ordinary; it was by his handling of colour and form that he made them eloquent. An old debate has come alive again. Alternatives are on offer. Léger can still excite.

something of le Carré's theme. The world of espionage emerges as a drab international brotherhood of men without women; a surrogate family in which women, as wives or mistresses, are mere accessories, as disposable as names or faiths. By identifying the lonely seaside resort where Magnus kills himself with the scene of a childhood escapade, when he and Rick had ridden their cycles, singing, along the sands, the television series reinforces the novel's motif of family betrayal. Magnus is less a symbol of paradise lost than a man for whom paradise was never more than a jaunty catch-penny tune.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 360
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than January 8. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date.
Entries marked "Author, Author 360" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on January 15.

1 I kneel for help; O! lay that hand on me.
Adored Cesar! and my Faith is such,
I shall be head'd, if that my KING bid touch.
The Evil is not Yours: my sorrow kings,
Mine is the Evil, but the Cure, the KING.

2 I visited the duchess of Ormond this morning; she does not go over with the duke. I spoke to her to get a lead touched for the evil; the son of a grocer in Caple street, one Bell, this ladies have bought sugar and plums of him. Mrs Mary used to go there often. This is Patrick's account; and the poor fellow has been here some months with his boy. But the queen has not been able to touch, and it now grows so warm, I fear she will not at all.

3 His mother, yielding to the superstitious notion, which it is wonderful to think, prevailed as long in

this country, as to the virtue of the regal touch: a notion which our kings encouraged, and to which a man of such inquiry and such judgement as Carré could give credit; carried him to London, where he was actually touched by Queen Anne.

Competition No 356
Winner: Kathleen Bell
Answers:

1 At last divine Cecilia came.
Inventress of the vocal frame;
The sweet Enthusiast, from her sacred store,
Enlarged the former narrow bounds,
And added length to solemn sounds.
With Nature's mother wit, and arts unknown before,
John Dryden, "Alexander's Feast: or The Power of Music: An Ode in Honour of St Cecilia's Day, 1697".

2 Hark! the numbers soft and clear,
Gently steal upon the ear;
Now louder, and yet louder rise
And fill with spreading sounds the skies.
Alexander Pope, "Ode for Music on St Cecilia's Day".

3 At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing,
Came out of their trance into time again,
And round the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.
W. H. Auden, "Anthem for St Cecilia's Day".

Melancholy pleasures

H. R. Woudhuysen

SHAKESPEARE
Twelfth Night
Riverside Studios

It is ten to eight in Illyria, snowing, and Christmas is well under way. There are plenty of drinks and jokes, a tree and presents, as well as songs and hangovers. The twelve days of Christmas pass; there is more snow; time untangles the lovers' knot and Malvolio swears his revenge: it is still ten to eight on the grandfather clock. So many things have happened: the usual family rows and disagreements, barely suppressed jealousies and resentments, choice specimens of bad behaviour and semi-private romantic intrigues are all remembered through a haze of drinks which satisfy various appetites; Christmas has come and gone again, but clock-time for once has stood still. Illyria is not hot and sunny, but neither is it really cold. It has that warm dampness that comes with snow - a place somewhere between laughter and tears, but which is never merely sentimental. The country has its large houses for Orsino and Olivia, but its only visible part is an iron-gated graveyard, broad enough for the Duke to feed his melancholy love. Olivia to mourn her dead father and brother, and where her Steward can be imprisoned and tormented within a convenient tomb. Illyria is not quite Victorian England but very like our Dickens-inspired idea of it: black, formal clothes, stiff, formal behaviour covering a world of restrained erotic desire and unrestrained imaginative power: not the Dickens of *Pickwick* or *A Christmas Carol* but of *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, where secrecy and tragedy will eventually give birth to revelation and joy.

The pleasure principle lies firmly behind Kenneth Branagh's production of *Twelfth Night*, resulting in a carefully measured read-

ing of the play which brings out its irresistible charm, without suppressing its undeniable awkwardness and strangeness. This is deliberately emphasized by reversing the order of the play's first and second scenes, making Viola's resolution to serve Olivia even more abrupt and lacking in credibility than Johnson found it to be. Branagh is well served by a young Viola (Frances Barber) and an attractive Olivia (Caroline Langrishe). Most of all, he has a first-rate Maria (Abigail McKern), who moves convincingly between her mistress and the five satellites of the household. This quintet, Belch, Aguecheek, Malvolio, Maria and Feste, come perilously close to taking the play over, so assured and well worked are their performances. Indeed, in a sense, *Twelfth Night* offers less to the actors playing the four lovers (especially to the Duke and Sebastian) than it does to Olivia's household. James Simons and James Saxon as the thin man and the fat man, with Anton Lesser's sinister, long-haired Feste, under the supervision and direction of the expert Maria, are a real match even for Richard Briers's superb Malvolio. Briers creates a painfully credible Steward, in turns pathetic and hateful, both Uriah Heep and Mr Guppy, cruelly abused but, we feel, badly in need of some pain and humiliation.

It is no mean achievement to create a *Twelfth Night* which so successfully evokes and captures the moment and mood of the play. This is partly made possible by the production's well-judged lighting, but more is contributed by pleasing music written by Pat Doyle and Paul McCartney and played by a quartet of musicians (piano, cello, horn and timpani), who are on stage throughout the production, discreetly hidden by some bare trees. Perhaps the only disappointment of an evening otherwise completely without vulgarity, is Feste's singing in an American folk-song drone. But this is only a small failing in a production which fulfils most of what one wants and always hopes for from the play.

Making everyday magic

Helen McNeil

Housekeeping
Renol/Cinema

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* (1981) is a lyrical novel about generations of women who live surrounded by an everyday magic of their own making. Bill Forsyth's screenplay and film, a comedy of conformity and non-conformity, bring Robinson's story closer to the tone of more recent "dirty realist" novels such as Louise Erdrich's *The Beer Queen* without sacrificing the fresh, almost wondering, quality of the original.

The film establishes its comic tone before tackling its themes. When the heroines' mother stops at a green light and pulls away as it turns red, the scene is instantly recognizable as a mid-century American example of that slow-lake, unemphatic comedy of human nature which is by now Forsyth's signature. Mother deposits Ruthie and Lucille at Orland and then gets some gormless boy scouts to help her out of a rut, after which she accelerates comically, suicidally over a cliff into the bottomless lake which sits at the centre of the story. Grandma lasts a while (in the novel she is a rather more significant goddess of cycles), then come two timid aunts. When the female vagrant Aunt Sylvie shows up, she is lauded the care of what are by now two teenage girls.

At this point the themes of film and novel begin to converge. Inside the gingerbread house, a loving witch-woman teaches freedom by example, transforming the gynaeceum of the isolated single parent into the stuff of fairy-tale. There are no important men and there is no sex in such a tale. Sylvie has never learnt the meaning of fear and shame; this "liberty" is invigorating, but it is balanced by the unsettling way that old newspapers, tin can darkness and cats accumulate wherever she goes. Not death but separation is the fear; the

film's first tears are shed when pert Lucille reverses the conventions of 1950s teen revolt by rebelling into convention. When she runs away, it is a flight into tidiness. Lumpy, poetic Ruthie (a sensitive performance by Sara Walker) says in voice-over, "I had no sister after that night." More tears follow when small-town notions of correct upbringing threaten to part Ruthie and Sylvie. In one brilliant tragicomic scene Sylvie nearly rallies a delegation of outraged church matrons to her cause by recalling movingly how her entire family lives on for her in her niece. She then forfeits their sympathy by prattling just a little too enthusiastically about the many practical uses of her newspaper collection.

As in Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl*, the drama of *Housekeeping* centres on adolescence, but it is a choice of selfhood rather than of romance that marks the passage from childhood. Forsyth's magic realism stresses the subversive potential in such a choice. Normal adults are stunted authority freaks. Sylvie, by contrast, is the boundary breaker, instinctively deconstructing the dualities of order and chaos, day and night, wilderness and dead, ours and theirs.

Marilynne Robinson's novel is filled with homages to story-telling and myth-making. Bruno Bettelheim, Vladimir Propp, perhaps Jung himself, lurk not far below the surface of Fingerbone lake. Forsyth responds to this challenge by visualizing a story-telling atmosphere. The amateur landscapes by the grandfather who came west are beautiful (they are by the popular contemporary Scottish artist Stephen Campbell). The lake is exquisite, particularly in the unrealistic process shots. Many of the film's most resonant images function as homilies: life is like using a broom to sweep up a flood; pressed flowers in a dictionary are part of its vocabulary; sometimes you keep your house best by burning it down. The film ends with Ruthie and Sylvie walking not into a sunset but along dark railway tracks into a future whose only certainty is that it is to be continued.

COMMENTARY

An emotional odyssey

Deborah Singmaster

The Dead
Lumière cinema

The late John Huston's film of "The Dead" is the outcome of his lifelong admiration for James Joyce and his affection for Ireland. The script has been written by his son, Tony, and the part of Gretta, Gabriel Conroy's wife, is played by his daughter, Anjelica.

Joyce wrote "The Dead" in exile, as a celebration of Irish hospitality and a fitting end to that sombre collection of short stories, *Dubliners*. In many respects the film is a slavishly faithful reproduction of the story. It takes place on the night of the Mises Morkan's annual Christmas party, seen by Joyce as a typical example of Dublin's social life in full swing. The original dialogue is reverently quoted with few additions where a busier sound track would have been more in keeping with the festive spirit Joyce intended. The party pieces - Mary Jane's piano recital, Aunt Julia's singing - are religiously enacted and, to fill up screen time, a recitation of a translation by Lady Gregory has been added (Joyce would not have approved, he had little time for the Celtic revivalists). Missing from the party (possibly for financial reasons) is the crowd of young people, Mary Jane's pupils, who create a background of bustling excitement in the story and add to the sense of occasion. Joyce's party was fun, Huston's is a staid affair.

The shabby gentility of the Morkans' house has been beautifully created by the designer, Stephen Grimes. The characters are, with a few unimportant divergences, as Joyce described them: ages, faces, accents are right, the casting is flawless. Cathleen Delaney gives a most moving performance as the frail Aunt Julia and that splendid Dublin actor Donal Donnelly is the perfect embodiment of the

alcoholic Freddie Malins. If Donal McCann as Gabriel overplays the one pained expression, he is not wholly to blame. Joyce's treatment of his central character is psychological, concentrating on what is happening in Gabriel's head and heart rather than on anything he may do or say. His social anxiety, his desire for his wife once the party is over, his jealousy when she tells him of her dead childhood sweetheart, Michael Furey, and his confrontation with universal mortality - all these shifting emotions are internalized in Joyce's telling of the story.

This emotional odyssey could only have been conveyed by the most imaginative camera work and editing. But Huston has opted for conventional camera angles with little variation of lighting or cutting pace. Only one sequence - a montage of the Aunts' family souvenirs - achieves its own lyricism independent of Joyce's prose. A rare close-up of Gabriel's hand touching Gretta's face is cut off abruptly before it can express anything of Gabriel's sensuous longing. Joyce's own "camera directions" have been ignored: the lingering pan over the food; the mystery surrounding Gretta as she listens to the pivotal song - "a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow"; the flashbacks to early happier days of the Conroys' marriage; Gabriel's unflattering glimpse of himself in the bedroom mirror. And where is Dublin? Joyce has the Conroys walk back along the Quays to O'Connell's Bridge. Huston bundles them into a carriage and gives us only a fleeting glimpse of O'Connell's statue as they drive past. And one knows the scene in the hotel is doomed from the moment Anjelica Huston's name appears at the head of the opening credits. Huston has shifted the final emphasis from Gabriel to Gretta. Anjelica Huston gives a moving performance, as she mourns Michael Furey, up-staging Donal McCann's Gabriel so that we scarcely connect him with the voice reciting the elegiac ending over a series of static snow-covered landscapes. Sadly, not one of Huston's best films.

Up-to-date ideas

Maya Slater

MOLIÈRE
The Sisterhood
Translated by R. R. Bolt
New End Theatre, Hampstead

Molière's *Les Femmes savantes* resists being brought into the twentieth century. It deals with a group of women who refuse to accept that their place is in the home, supervising the seasoning of the *potage*. Instead, they aspire to scholarship, and as a result are held up before the audience as objects of derision.

The *Sisterhood*, a firmly modernized version of this seventeenth-century play, is set in the Paris of today; the characters mention topical details like Chirac kissing Madonna. The women discuss deconstruction; Derrida, Lacan and Foucault are at one stage dismissed as old hat.

At best, R. R. Bolt's translation is a marvel of ingenuity. In the original Molière, the pedant Trissotin recites an absurd poem on the subject of a violet-coloured carriage he had offered to his beloved; Bolt translates this as a purple Porsche. The inane comments of the *femmes savantes* about Trissotin's poems are transformed into a Marxist reading worthy of Bakhtin.

But Bolt has trouble in updating the events of the play. In Molière's original, the tyranny of Philaminte, the leading bookworm, is demonstrated when she seems set on bullying her daughter Henriette into marrying the repellent Trissotin. This marriage is distressing because the girl hates her intended husband; more important, it seems totally inappropriate that the wife, not the husband, should be taking such decisions. Nowadays the situation is entirely different. How can a poised, modern young woman allow her mother to force her into a hateful marriage? Bolt does his best with this by making Philaminte the rich member of the family (a situation impossible in Molière's day, when not only a wife's possessions, but her

very person, were the husband's property). Henriette enjoys her opulent style of living: her mother threatens to disinherit her if she disobeys. This device just about carries the play along, but is not really convincing. How could this Philaminte, who swears by Andrea Dworkin and argues in favour of feminism, force a daughter into a loveless marriage? This sort of problem makes an up-to-date version of this play fundamentally unsatisfactory.

Other problems find happier solutions, even if Molière might have failed to see their point. The maidservant, Martine, launches into an illiterate anti-feminist diatribe about a woman's place being in the home. In the original, the impact is provided in part at least by the contrast between Martine's uneducated speech and the rightness of her views. But this Martine (played with screeching gusto by Jacqueline Tong) is funny because both her views and their formulation are ridiculous. In short, *The Sisterhood* capitalizes both on Molière's own witteisms, and on the inappropriateness of the attitudes expressed when the original is translated into modern dress.

The play is performed with lively enjoyment by a committed cast of uniformly good actors. It is a pity that they have to double up some of the parts: it is particularly difficult to sympathize with the sensible Ariste, only to see the same actor (Thomas Wheatley) reappearing, undisguised, as a gloriously dislikable Trissotin.

The winners of this year's London Weekend Television "Plays on Stage" award are Cheek By Jowl, who submitted a proposal for a production of *Philoketes* by Sophocles; the Bush Theatre, with *The Furthermost* by Murray Watts; and Wildcat Stage Productions of Glasgow, with *Waiting on One* by Anne Downie. Plays on Stage is a competitive scheme open to theatre companies, which aims to put "a significant sum of money" into three separate productions a year. The three prizes this year - the first year of the award - are worth £15,000, £12,000 and £10,000.

Debate and delusion

Chris Baldick

RENE WELLEK
A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950
Volume Five: English Criticism 1900-1950
343pp, 0 224 02859 6
Volume Six: American Criticism 1900-1950
345pp, 0 224 02860 X
Cape, £20 each.

One of the great monuments of modern literary history reaches completion with the appearance of the final two volumes of René Wellek's *History of Modern Criticism*. Some fifty years of scholarly toil have gone into this massive and authoritative work: a stilt equivalent to a quarter of the chronological span which it embraces. First planned as a four-volume survey, the *History* has, in the years since the first volume was published in 1955, far overgrown its original schedules, not because its author has for a moment strayed in the direction of the expansive or the digressive in his writing, but because he has imposed upon himself a simple but exacting standard: namely the setting aside of all legend and received opinion in favour of a first-hand reading of every significant work by every significant critic between 1750 and 1950.

Wellek's earlier volumes on the nineteenth century ranged widely from Russia across Europe to the United States in unrivalled international command of literary-critical issues, but left him with the twentieth century still to tackle as his eightieth birthday passed. In these last volumes, then, much has had to be abandoned in order to complete the monument: the riches of Italy and Eastern Europe are set aside so that the Anglophone tradition at least can be brought up to the finishing line. This is a severe loss, but it does make some sense given the pronounced isolationism of British and American criticism in the first half of this century. The disorientation which has since followed the belated renewal of contacts with European theory owes as much to those decades of introversion as it does to the allegedly noxious character of the Continental plague. Wellek himself, fully inculcated by his early association with the Prague Linguistic Circle, has many occasions in these volumes to scold the English and Americans not just for their ignorance of European philosophies and literatures but for their antipathy to theory.

The paradox of Wellek's approach to his materials is that by obeying the historian's first duty to the primary sources he has produced what is, in some important respects, not a history of criticism at all but a compendium of studies in the leading critics. As in previous volumes, individual cases (although he refuses to call them that) come first, and the relations among them are discussed only incidentally if at all, since Wellek is convinced that "individual initiative rather than collective trends matters in criticism." It is true that in literary criticism the idea of history as a succession of important individuals is less implausible than it is in economics or politics, and it remains an essential task of the literary historian to safeguard the peculiarities of major mavericks like William Empson or Kenneth Burke against the temptation to squeeze them into inappropriate categories; yet the many virtues of Wellek's close attention to "critical personalities" carry with them a significant loss of perspective at the neglected level of the general pattern.

The prospect of a more comparative and synoptic history of criticism has rarely been outlined more clearly than by a contributor to the *Yale Review* in 1961 in an article entitled "The Main Trends of Twentieth-Century Criticism." This piece, a triumph of concise summary, enumerated the *imporant* critical movements in this century (psychoanalysis, Marxism, linguistic analysis, "organistic formalism", and myth criticism), and observed that "one is struck by the fact that from a very wide perspective a large part of twentieth-century criticism shows a remarkable resemblance of aim and method, even where there are no direct historical relationships". That the author of this article was René Wellek would hardly be credited by most readers of this *History*, in which the general trends are so often irritably dismissed. Here, the integrity of each author's *oeuvre* takes precedence even over Wellek's terminal date of 1950, so that

Empson's work is followed right through to the posthumous *Using Biography* (1984) and the excellent chapter on F. R. Leavis (first published in 1963) is updated to his death in 1978. Squeezed out by these extended single-author chapters are those significant contributions by scholars and critics who are remembered only for one book: Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, a major incitement to later myth critics, is not examined at all.

A further self-imposed restriction appears in the discussion of those important "culture-critics" whose literary theories and judgments are manifestly entangled with larger political and religious commitments. Wellek is fully aware of the continuities, but feels obliged to draw a line somewhere, beyond which his account must not stray. This proves to be troublesome in the chapters on Lionel Trilling and Edmund Wilson, while the crucial chapter on T. S. Eliot is noticeably weakened by an unwillingness to assess as a whole the cultural politics of this most influential of modern critics. Similarly Wellek refuses to acknowledge any connection between the doctrines of original sin and of literary "impersonality" in the American New Critics, preferring to seek the origin of critical theories within the literary tradition alone (here, in Flaubert and Joyce) despite the obvious Christian commitments of the New Critics, and despite their debt to Eliot, who himself hinted strongly at the connection.

The defence of the New Critics against subsequent detractors lies at the centre of the American volume. There are misgivings about their Anglocentrism, their lipsliparian view of literary history and their condemnation of paraphrase as a "heresy", but Wellek concludes that they "waged a valiant fight which, I am afraid, must be fought over again" against

scientism, relativism, and "the imposition of critical norms required by political indoctrination". As a vindication of New Criticism, though, Wellek's brief chapter (much of it made up of sentences transposed from the individual studies of leading participants) is a disappointment. Although he rightly reminds us of the precedent historical positivism against which the New Critics reacted, he tends to miss the point of more recent critiques, and drifts into quibbles about the definition of formalism.

Despite these problems, the essential strengths of the *History* have been maintained and can be appreciated on almost every page: the perfect clarity, the fluent exposition, the informed choice of apt quotation, and above all the forthright and fearless judgment. Among the critical reputations which collapse under Wellek's cool appraisal are those of T. E. Hulme (too inconsistent), E. M. Forster (a muddled thinker), G. Wilson Knight (a mystic who attempted a "reconciliation of everything with everything"), and R. P. Blackmur (a pretentious obfuscator and charlatan). Wellek hands down severe rebukes to Leavis and I. A. Richards for their narrow English empiricism, to Yvor Winters for dogmatic arrogance, and to Kenneth Burke for a scatological perversity which found hitherto unnoticed turds in Keats's odes (this "strains all credulity", Wellek objects, with a perfectly straight face). Individual works cannot escape, either: Herbert Grierson's *Critical History of English Poetry* is a "deplorable book", and Van Wyck Brooks's often admired five-volume history of American literature, *Makers and Finders*, is trite, incoherent, and altogether "a dismal failure". None of these verdicts could be called intemperate or hasty. They are arrived at with

the same careful deliberation which appears in the judicious account of A. C. Bradley and which corrects the myth of Virginia Woolf's supposed critical impressionism.

Wellek grants respect and praise where it is due, even to critics like F. O. Matthiessen or Philip Rahv who are far removed from his own position, and he does his best to restrain his impatience with the English empirics – except when they offend his Czech sensibilities by waxing sentimental over "the Russian soul". There are some unexpected prizes awarded in these volumes, too: John Middleton Murry is recommended for rehabilitation, along with the much more obscure W. C. Brownell, who acted as Edith Wharton's editor at Scribner's. His forgotten works, *Victorian Prose Masters* (1901) and *American Prose Masters* (1909), seem more valuable to Wellek than the critical writings of Santayana, More and Babbitt.

Readers who assume that a history of criticism is by definition the dullest kind of exorcism upon the world of letters – so far from creativity, so near to bibliography – might surprise themselves by dipping into these volumes. They condense many of the most turbulent debates and some of the strangest delusions in this century's culture, and exhibit the oddest exotica of Anglo-Saxon intellectual life. At times even the apparently endless chain of commentary threatened in the criticism of criticism must halt in mute astonishment at the bizarre and inexplicable element in critical judgment: to D. H. Lawrence goes the honour of reducing René Wellek to blank exasperation in this, the shortest paragraph in the entire *History* – "What can one say when Lawrence writes that Chekhov 'is a second-rate writer and a willy wet-leg'?" What indeed?

Reading ec-centrally

John Lucas

THOMAS DOCHERTY
On Modern Authority: The theory and condition of writing: 1500 to the present day
310pp, Brighton: Harvester, £25 (paperback, £9.95).
07108 10172

Towards the end of this ambitious book Thomas Docherty remarks that our present need is not for the kind of generic theories of literary history proposed by Northrop Frye and, more recently, Alistair Fowler. Instead, a "degeneric" mode of theory is required, one

which will examine not only the echoes which align writers but, more crucially, the areas of differentiation which wedge them apart historically. It is perhaps only through such promiscuous mingling of heterogeneous writings that criticism could ever begin the task of "thinking forward through the mothers."

If I understand Docherty correctly here, he is saying that generic theories are authoritarian and thus essentially masculinist, whereas a feminist approach to theory inevitably challenges and deconstructs such authority. Or it may be that he wants to assert that any challenge to the authority of generic theory will be somehow feminist, because feminism must of its nature endorse heterogeneity (which is as much as to say that feminism equals anti-authoritarianism). Here, however, one recalls Lisa Jardine's warning that male critics should beware of taking over feminism and especially of offering to supply "rigorous" "thrusting" – ie, phalliccentric – applications of feminist theories. Besides, Docherty's point is unexceptionable and hardly needs to be, so fussily dressed up. It is that most literary history and theory runs the risk of producing totalizing accounts, whether from an idealist or historicist standpoint.

At its best – the first half in particular – Docherty's book is notable for its deliberately challenging readings of a number of Renaissance works. He himself calls such readings "ec-centric" and means by this to call into question assumptions about what particular texts can mean, including something so fundamental as editorial assumptions about what are "correct" texts. The long opening chapter therefore takes issue with any number of critics, scholars and editors who have too readily assumed that

their way of doing things is and must be the right way. Docherty will have none of it. We do not, as readers, "construct the meaning of a text, but rather we construct meaning in it (in literary terms) and through it (in historical terms). The text, as it were, once written becomes 'an autonomous space of meaning' awaiting animation or enactment through its critical reading." This is both true and less contentious than I suspect Docherty thinks. On the other hand the literary and historical terms to which he appeals are undoubtedly contentious. They also raise severe and perhaps insoluble difficulties.

One of these is as simple as it is basic. For all his wanting not to be trapped into a vague or grandly totalizing account of periodicity, Docherty frequently falls back on generalization, the effect of which is precisely to confuse or lose sight of those differentiations he claims to be eager to retain. It is one thing to offer interesting and in many ways properly suggestive interpretations, of, for example, *As You Like It* and poems by Carew and Herbert. It is quite another to suggest that "the loss of stable identity, itself a result of the loss of a stable home, with the realization of the relativity of England and even of the earth . . . was partly responsible for the conflicts of modes of authority which condition the writing of the early seventeenth century". This begs far too many questions. And that "partly" is a weasel word. It may seem to provide Docherty with the perfect way out of the corner into which his (or perhaps Lawrence Stone's) historical terms have boxed him, but in effect it drains away the strength of his case. At all events, there is very little sense in trying to fit Milton into the argument, and if Milton is to be an instance of those who cannot be thought of as part of the generalizations then something has gone badly wrong. Nor is it sensible to hope that if you ignore Milton the problem will go away, although that is what Docherty does. For if you fail to confront the issues raised by Milton's challenge to and assumption of authority, I do not see how you can begin to make any real sense of the seventeenth century.

Docherty tries to get round this by suggesting that perhaps the major concern for writers in the later years of the period was the difficulty of establishing a sense of self. Death had forced itself on people's consciousness, largely because of the deaths which occurred as a result of the Civil War, and with that went a diffi-

culty in producing a sense of self, of authentic "living in the present". I can see that this is an arguable proposition (although death is hardly unique to the period), but not that the argument can be furthered by detailed analysis of plays by Corneille and Racine, because no matter how valuable such analyses may be – and they are often very good – they have precious little to do with English concerns.

I stress English because, given the overriding context of his work, it is here that Docherty is most adrift. He rightly sees that "criticism as such begins to get under way when an indigenous culture and literature become isolated as its subject". He then goes on to assert that writers such as Pope and Swift seem to fear critical activity because it threatens their sense of "self-stability". If a critic is to be allowed to read Pope, say, it must be in the sense that Pope intends and wishes to determine. But of course this may not happen, in which case the "dunces" will have succeeded in taking away Pope's authority and with it his sense of identity. Well, yes. But Docherty misses the manner in which, following on from and at the same time challenging Milton's position (who speaks for England?), Pope and Swift construct an idea of English culture as a European culture; and that, at its best, this carries with it an appeal to an enlightened political vision, the chief threat to which must be party or sectarian interest.

Admittedly, such a vision is coercive and, finally, exclusive. But it is not one that can be fairly thought of as founded in narrow self-interest. On the contrary, it is truly selfless in that it requires both writers to construct writerly identities which are in no sense self-serving or protective. So that for Docherty to argue that the attempt to stabilize language in the period 1660-1780 serves the purpose of "assuring writers of their own self-evident authority and of their own knowable and self-present identity" is to miss the point. For these writers are collectively involved in the creation of a larger (English) identity than he is aware of, and it is that which needs to be challenged. The challenge of course is at the heart of the Romantic enterprise and it is both symptomatic and revealing that Docherty should have virtually nothing to say about Blake or Wordsworth or Shelley or Byron. Given these and other notable absences, it is probably fair to describe *On Modern Authority* as a series of re-readings strung together on a rope of sand.

Thinking the unthought

Chris Norris

RODOLPHE GASCHÉ
The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the philosophy of reflection
348pp, Harvard University Press, £22.25.
0674 86700 9
JACQUES DERRIDA
Glas
Translated by John P. Leivey Jr and Richard Rand
262pp, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, \$34.
0802 1667 X
JOHN P. LEAVEY JR
Glossary
320pp, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, \$34.
08032 2871 6

Rodolphe Gasché's book sets out to rescue deconstruction for philosophy and, as part of the same task, to contest what he regards as the errors and distortions that have marked its arrival on the North American scene. These have come about, Gasché argues, through the readiness of literary critics to pick up one or two salient "themes" from Derrida's work – like the privilege attached to writing over speech – and then use them as a platform for advancing their own special interests. What they typically ignore is that further, more difficult stage in the deconstructive reading of a text which doesn't rest content with merely inverting a received opposition but goes on to reinscribe both its terms in another, wholly unfamiliar economy of sense. Such is the error that Richard Rorty makes when he enlists Derrida on the side of a "literary" discourse that would finally break with the deluded truth-claims of philosophy. In fact, according to Gasché, "writing" for Derrida "has no proper value of its own, positive or negative", and certainly not the kind of ultimate privilege that would justify literary critics (or anti-philosophers like Rorty) in their use of it as a slogan for rhetorical purposes.

Gasché has some strong points to make against this widespread misappropriation of Derrida's texts. One is the fact that "literature" has always been determined as in some sense the other of philosophy; that since Plato at least, the discourse on literary topics has taken its terms from the governing lexicon of philosophical concepts and categories. This means that there is no getting "outside" philosophy to some alternative ground where the concepts in question would no longer apply. A deconstructive reading must always reach the point where its notions of the "literary" turn out to be implicated in a certain genealogy of philosophic argument. In the case of metaphor, as Derrida remarks in his essay "The White Mythology", it is impossible to advance a single proposition as to the nature of figural language without in the process rejoining that tradition of philosophic thinking about metaphor which has set the main terms of debate from Aristotle's day to the present. The same applies to those various concepts of mimesis or poetic truth which critics have advanced by way of defence against the claims of disapproving philosophers and moralists. For again it is the case – as Gasché points out, following Derrida – that philosophy will always have occupied in advance the ground upon which these defences are conducted.

Gasché's second line of argument follows directly from this. It has to do with the relationship between deconstruction and a certain theme of "reflexivity" which has more or less prevailed in literary-critical treatments of the topic. On this account, the aim of a deconstructive reading is to draw out those moments of rhetorical doubling or self-implicated paradox where the text puts its own authority into question by reflecting on the endlessly elusive character of meaning and consciousness in general. These moments produce a kind of infinite regression (more fashionably, a *mise en abyme*) which reveals the non-existence of any ultimate ground: any means of arresting the otherwise vertiginous play of specular representations. Gasché considers this a false idea of what deconstruction is properly about. "Reflection and reflexivity" are precisely what will not fit in Derrida's work – not because he

would wish to refute or reject them in favour of a dream of immediacy, but because his work questions reflection's unthought, and thus the limits of its possibility." Hence the decidedly cryptic title of Gasché's book, where the "tain" of the mirror (from French *étain*) refers to the "rinfail, the silver lining, the lusterless back" in the absence of which no reflection could occur, but which itself lacks any kind of mirroring or reflective quality. And so it is with deconstruction, an activity whose real interest is in that which lies behind, beyond or beneath the paradoxes of self-conscious speculative thought. Thus Derrida's philosophy is engaged in exploring systematically that "dull surface" which enables reflection to occur, but which cannot itself take part in "reflection's scintillating play".

This involves, firstly, a detailed account of how Fichte and Schelling pressed the dualities of Kantian thought toward the twin extremes of subjective and objective idealism. These putative "systems" were in turn criticized by Hegel, who expressly identified with Schelling's (objective) dialectics of nature, but whose main contention was that thinking should overcome such bad antinomies in the passage to a higher stage of truly dialectical synthesis. Thus in Hegel's mature philosophy "being and thinking are one, only moments in the objective process of self-developing thought". But Hegel also sees that this wished-for outcome is dependent on a prior assumption, namely that concepts and sensuous intuitions must at some point coincide in what Kant had termed the "transcendental unity of apperception". Kant's philosophy therefore rests on the two-fold axiomatic claim that "intuitions without concepts are blind" and "concepts without intuitions are empty". But this remains a matter of juridical fiat, rather than lending itself to any kind of rigorous transcendental deduction. It thus gives rise to that oscillating movement between idealism in its "subjective" and "objective" modes that characterized the post-Kantian history of thought. What Hegel brings out – and what is also, according to Gasché, brought out by deconstruction in its rigorous, Derridian form – is the fact that no form of speculative reason can hope to articulate the "unthought" background of assumptions from which its own dialectical strategies take rise.

"Difference", "arche-writing", "supplementarity" and other such Derridian key-terms are various names for that which exceeds philosophical reflection in its quest for legitimizing principles or grounds. They should be seen, Gasché suggests, as so many "quasi-transcendentals" or "infrastructures", paradoxically marking both the limits of conceptual critique and (in an eminently Kantian sense) its conditions of possibility. Rather than merely dispose of reflexivity ("the surest way for it to re-enter through the backdoor"), deconstruction sets out to think the limits of speculative reason and to show where it encounters irreducible problems in the nature of its own enterprise. One should not be misled, therefore, when Gasché uses the word "play" to

describe that perpetual slippage or undecidedness which governs the working of these "infrastructural" predicates. Such play has nothing whatsoever to do with the attitude of free-for-all interpretative licence which is commonly applied to deconstruction by literary critics (who welcome its advent) and by mainstream analytical philosophers (who reject it as merely a species of last-ditch rhetorical sophistry). It should rather be conceived – as Derrida suggests – by analogy with a piece of precision machinery where the "play" between parts, for instance in a bearing, is a matter of fine tolerance and essential to the machine's proper functioning.

All the same there are problems with Gasché's attempt to define what should or should not be accounted a proper, philosophically valid use of Derrida's work. His position is hard to maintain if one considers, for instance, how "writing" functions in the chapters on Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, or (again) how Derrida's essays on Freud complicate the relation between life, writing and fantasy-investment to a point where such distinctions must appear grossly misconceived. Gasché is no doubt right to insist that these texts cannot be reduced to just one more, ultra-sophisticated variant of old-style thematic criticism. Thus "writing" as it figures in Rousseau's corpus is a term whose unsettling chain of effects goes far beyond anything that could ever be pinned down or treated as a straightforward literary "theme". So Gasché might seem fully justified in his claim that "writing, a concept that has been so easily accommodated by so-called deconstructionist criticism, has little or nothing to do with the (anthropological, subjective, and so on) act of writing, with the psychological pleasures and displeasures to which it gives rise . . .". But again, such statements must appear unduly restrictive when set alongside Derrida's reading of Rousseau. For there is simply no way of drawing such a firm, juridical line between "writing" as the quasi-transcendental term which governs the elusive economy of Rousseau's discourse and "writing" as the theme, activity or focus of obsessional fear and desire which effectively provides the *mise-en-scène* of Derrida's reading. And the same applies to all those other deconstructive key-terms which Gasché would likewise restore to a condition of philosophical purity and rigour.

Meanwhile there has now appeared in English translation – though this word seems hardly appropriate – the one text of Derrida that most holds out against any such categorical treatment. That *Glas* goes unmentioned in Gasché's book is perhaps not surprising, given its reputation as the *ne plus ultra* of philosophy's undoing at the hands of rhetoric and intertextual "treachery". In fact this idea is somewhat wide of the mark, since Derrida is here just as much concerned with issues in the province of post-Kantian (and especially Hegelian) philosophy. But it raises these questions in a form that generates the maximum possible resistance to any reading in straight-

forwardly conceptual or philosophic terms. The text is laid out in a running series of columns, commentaries and inset paragraphs, all of which the reader is supposed to take in by treating them on equal terms and not looking for some "meta-language" or privileged voice of authority and power. The two main sources are Hegel and Genet, on the one hand the philosopher of Absolute Reason, of the State, Christianity and the bourgeois family as embodiments of universal truth, on the other the homosexual thief-turned-writer whose object was to tear these values apart by every means at his disposal.

At one level the effect of juxtaposing these utterly incongruous texts is to bring philosophy up against the limit of its own conceptual resources, transgressing all the margins and juridical border-lines that philosophy has established for the conduct of serious, responsible debate. Thus Hegel's dialectic is inscribed within a system of self-regulating concepts and values which ensure that truth is passed down through the channels of properly authorized thinking and teaching. This system connects in turn with the sexual division of labour where reason is exclusively a male prerogative, a power exercised by virtue of the husband's joint access to the domestic, intellectual and socio-political spheres, while the woman remains duty-bound to her role as wife, mother and family helpmeet.

Derrida goes various ways around to draw out this covert gender-politics everywhere at work in the texts of Hegelian philosophy. He incorporates passages on love, marriage and the family from Hegel's letters and other biographical material; examines the way in which his reading of the *Antigone* turns upon this same dialectical overcoming of woman's interests in the name of male reason and political order; and then goes on to show, through a series of elaborately staged intertextual readings, how other philosophers (including Kant) have likewise managed to suppress or sublate woman's voice while claiming to speak in the name of universal humanity and absolute reason. All this in counterpoint with the passages from Genet (chiefly *Our Lady of the Flowers* and *The Thief's Journal*) which supply not so much an ironic gloss as an adversary language which progressively invades and disfigures the discourse of Hegelian reason.

There is so much going on at every stage in this extraordinary text that a brief review can really offer no more than a few suggested points of entry. One recurrent topic is the question of names, signatures and the way that such marks of authorial presence and origin can always be dissolved through what Derrida calls the "disseminating" power of language, its capacity to graft them into new contexts of meaning where they function no longer as "proper" names but as signifying terms that generate all kinds of allusive cross-reference from text to text. Another is the distinction between "literal" and "figurative" sense, a difference that philosophers have often been concerned to hold securely in place, but which none the less continues to vex and elude their best efforts of conceptual clarification. There is a whole running subtext of allusions (via Genet) to the so-called "flowers" of rhetoric, the seductive tropology of metaphor and other such figures that exert their unsettling influence on the discourse of philosophic reason. And this goes along with Derrida's insistence on the stubborn *materiality* of language, the way that effects of meaning come about through chance collocations, unlooked-for homonyms and everything that holds out against reduction to a stable economy of words and concepts.

Hegelian logic thinks to overcome such resistance by assimilating language, history and thought to the terms of an all-embracing dialectic which moves ever onward and up through stages of resolved conflict and tension, to the point of an ultimate reconciliation in the name of Absolute Reason. This movement involves a twofold process of transcending and repressing whatever stands in its way; a process of conceptual "raising" (*Aufhebung*), which also requires that reason should sublimate those previous stages on the path to enlightenment that reflected an as-yet imperfect grasp of the relation between thought, self-knowledge and reality. What Derrida does is to

in progress

Chitchoing a chicken's furcula, festively,
[dull throb in slightly purpled first knuckle joint]
curling the left hand little finger
tight round the bifurcate, child-tugged fusion –

[twinge of it yesterday also as you played chess with the nipper . . .
premature arthritis?, cramp?] wish: *may they not miss me much.*

10 years and 3 months old; on the paper-white
temple, a turquoise vein like a hieroglyph:
Lucozade, crumbs of cake – each bird-slip
after a minute is puked up, rancid;

flaxen hair shed in handfuls, her cranium
bald as a pawn (unkind chemotherapy).
Medico and poetaster glibly
(equally impotent platitudes)

tender inadequate barbs.

PETER READING

Invaded by absence

John Sturrock

BRIAN ROTMAN
Signifying Nothing: The semiotics of zero
221pp. Macmillan. £29.50 (paperback, £9.95).
033455517

sions is the resistance that language continues to offer in the face of this relentless totalizing drive. It is a resistance that emerges not only in the form of uncontrolled linguistic figuration, but also at the level of ethics, religion and historical understanding.

Thus the progress of Hegelian dialectic is paralleled in his account of how Christianity (as revealed religious truth) supersedes and incorporates its Jewish source-texts, and again in his view of the bourgeois patriarchal family as the high point and natural, self-authorized foundation of present-day civil and socio-political order. "What is consciousness?", Derrida asks, "if its ultimate power is achieved by the family?" And again, what is at stake in this repeated scenario of dialectical ascent or *Aufhebung* if one of its forms is the presumed overcoming of Jewish by Christian religion? "To raise the Pharisaic letter of the Jew would also be to constitute a symbolic language wherein the literal body lets itself be animated, aerated, roused, lifted up, ennobled by the spiritual intention. Now the Jew is incapable of this in his family, his politics, his religion, his rhetoric. If he became capable of it, he would no longer be Jewish. When he will become capable of it, he will have become Christian." So there is more to Derrida's "wordplay" than a mere desire to take philosophy down a peg or two by exposing its arguments to the dislocating force of a Joycean paranoiac pushed to the giddy limit. What he is broaching in *Glas* is the deconstruction not only of certain tenacious philosophical ideas, but also of the way these ideas have worked to reinforce the predominant values and assumptions of Western ethnocentrism.

One can therefore see why he takes this opportunity (in an essay addressed specifically to English readers and included in the companion volume *Glossary*) to protest against the notion that it all comes down to a handful of "puns", or mere verbal gymnastics at the expense of philosophic seriousness and truth. On the one hand *Glas* might appear to be an untranslatable text, in the sense that it puts up the maximum resistance to any straightforward, self-assured passage of meaning from one language to another. But Derrida's point is that all philosophy partakes of this condition: that *Glas* in its "original" form ranged across a multitude of languages, idioms, discourses and registers; and that only if we think of concepts as existing in a realm of ideally transparent and communicable sense will this text seem to pose peculiar problems of translation not encountered, say, with "serious" thinkers like Kant or Hegel. It is commonly supposed that works of philosophy – unlike poems or fictional texts – should suffer no great loss in translation, since they have to do "essentially" with ideas and arguments, and not (or only in a superficial way) with matters of style or rhetorical presentation. In *Glas* Derrida sets out to undermine this belief by erasing all the margins, border-lines and territorial imperatives that normally serve to insulate philosophy from literature and other kinds of discourse. But he does so not merely in order to create a mischievous shake-up of the disciplines. "What do the Jews make of Hegel? What do they do with him? What do they do when they hear it said that the son is one with the father? When the unity of essence of father and son is presented to them?" One response to these questions is the rabbinic reading of Hegel and of Christianity: qntn-theological tradition that Derrida most strikingly proposes in *Glas*.

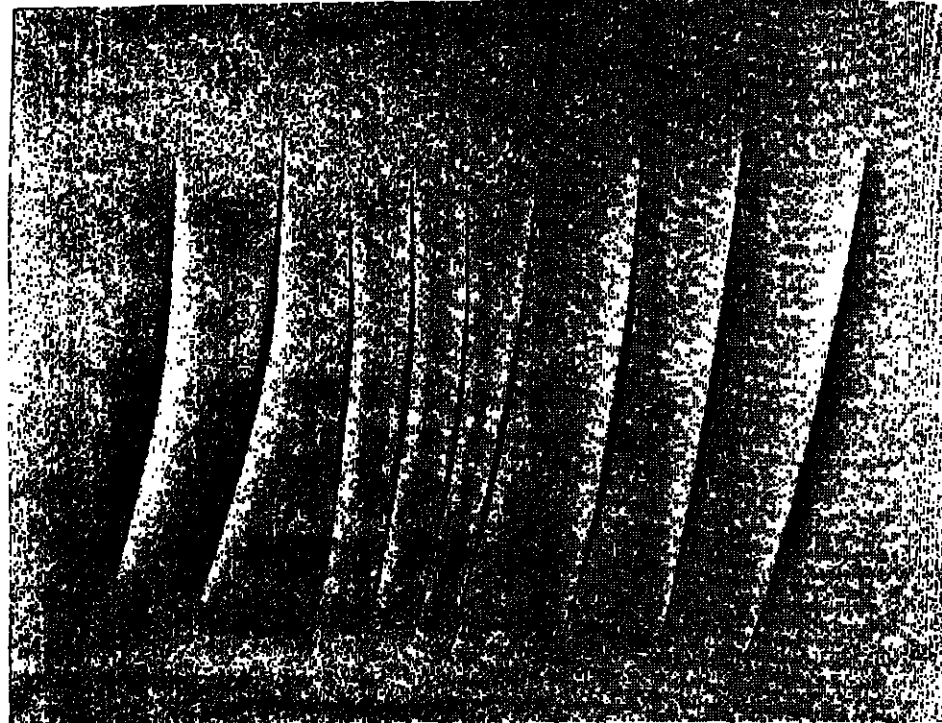
John P. Leavay has put together a useful *study edition* to Derrida's text, including a detailed concordance of names and topics, a series of working notes on the process of translation, a commentary on *Glas* in the context of current French critical thought, and an informative essay (by Gregory L. Ulmer) relating it to Derrida's previous and subsequent writings. This is not, as the jacket fortavishly proclaims, an "indispensable guide" to any "serious reading" of the text. In fact *Glas* itself provides most of the signposts for anyone reasonably familiar with Derrida's work, and willing to read with the special kind of attentiveness required by the book's compositional and stylistic demands. At the same time it is a pleasure to have a book that works with the complexities that one can turn to Leavay's commentary for help in understanding some of the more obscure sources and allusions.

The mathematicians' zero raises nice questions, as a sign without even the possibility of a real referent. There are no noughts in nature, only on paper, or in the head, which at once makes one want to ask whether the other, "positive" signs with which zero belongs, our numbers, have any basis in nature either. In short, as the semiotician of nothing, Brian Rotman is on to something, and he has written an alert, polymathic and mind-opening essay in pursuit of it.

Signifying Nothing is a work of post-structuralism inasmuch as it uses the mathematical zero-sign as a semiotic key with which to undo any naively naturalistic links between systems of representation and the reality, if any, they are supposedly representing. Rotman is a mathematician by training but his little book is not exclusively or even mainly to do with mathematical zero, since he aims to show how the function of this disturbing, liminal sign has exact analogies in two other, seemingly alien fields, in the history of art and in economics. He sets about this analogical business Foucault-fashion, looking for an epistemic shift in European history, zero-based as it were, that will mark an epoch – in the event, the coming of mercantile capitalism; but Rotman writes, mercifully, with more grace, economy and clarity than Foucault ever did.

The first half of this book is where the really interesting ideas are. In it Rotman traces the importation of the Hindu sign zero (not, note, the sign *for* zero, which would push zero confusingly and wrongly back again into the trans-mathematical world) into Europe and draws close, elegant parallels between the meaning and effect of this deep change to our mathematical notation and those of the discovery of a perspectival art organized around a vanishing-point, and of the creation of "imaginary", or what Adam Smith called "bank money", as a first defence against the debasement of the metal in real money. The implication or argument is, though Rotman does not labour it, that these three strictly isomorphic changes, in mathematics, painting and finance, happened when they did because they were conditioned by a nascent capitalism – the evidence for which conjunction, however, in the case of perspective in painting, seems no better than opportunistic.

But this glancing attempt to anchor his semiotic revolution in economic history hardly mat-



Lucio Fontana's "concento spaziale", 1962, was sold in July at Sotheby's for £154,000. It is reproduced here from Sotheby's: Art at Auction 1986-87 (4-Rpp. Sotheby's, £27.50, 085607342 0).

ters; what Rotman does very well is to establish that all three of his semiotic systems, whether their medium be numbers, lines or cash, changed in the same direction, towards a greater degree of abstraction. Rotman writes as, mathematically speaking, an anti-realist, and uses the zero-sign as clinching evidence against any argument for numerical realism, or the view that mathematics is dealing with something "out there", that its numbers or sets are transcendent entities. He supposes, on the contrary, a semiotic continuity between the zero-sign and the other signs in the numerical series of which it is the inaugural member, and zero obviously having no referent in the trans-mathematical world: how should its fellow members have one? His larger purpose is thus to rehumanize mathematics, by demonstrating its inescapable subjectivity or dependence on mathematicians. What zero "stands for" as a sign is the absence of other signs and it is only in the mind of the human operator, of "the one-who-counts", that absence is able to invade the plenitude of the world (there is a Sartrean flavour to Rotman's argument throughout).

The change he is analysing occurred in fact in two stages. First there came zero, out of the east, and then, two or three centuries later, algebra, with its fundamental institution of the "variable", or empty sign to be filled according to the needs or circumstances of the moment. Variables too, like zero, are meta-signs which display the alarming independence of reality

inherent in all signs, and it is this same independence which Rotman brings cleverly to light in the work of painters such as Vermeer and Velázquez, who play games with viewers of their paintings in their artful representation of the process of representation, and in the ultimate setting free of "imaginary" money from any lingering pretence that it is a currency redeemable by anything other than itself. At the zero-point in these three semiotic systems – and, by extension, all others – a human space is created, occupiable by whoever is doing the counting, the painting, or the trading: the cardinal point in the structuralist outlook on the world, where a system that is not personal engages with a user who is. As a structuralist, Rotman stands with Piaget (a thinker on whom he has written a book), in holding to a strongly "constructivist" view, whereby mental or semiotic structures are seen as made, not given. His demonstration of how such structures can evolve is exceedingly well done.

In the second half, however, *Signifying Nothing* declines as a book, when Rotman goes, too briefly for comfort, into Greek, Jewish and Christian views of the nature or theology of Nothing (a less compelling topic than zero on this occasion), and, for some reason, into the turning of love (and how did this sign come to stand for zero in the scoring of ball-games?) into a commodity by the unhappy King Lear. But the first sixty pages of this slim book are full of clear, compact and productive thought.

in terms of our own interests. Specifically, his claim is that this is the period in which language specialists "begin to see language both systematically and historically more as creating meaning than as containing it". Or (more forthright) that "the intoxicating and terrifying possibility of making meaning, reacted to and against in a bewildering variety of ways, is... one of the principal defining energies of the entire Renaissance".

These semantic questions, however, may not be the most productive ones for Waswo to ask, nor perhaps do the answers, "ventriloquize" his early texts as he might wish. His claim that the work of Valla implies the transition from a version of language which sees words and things as equivalent to the modern view that language constructs meaning is consistent with recent philosophical work (in particular Hanna-Barbara Gerl's important book *Rhetoric als Philosophie* which Waswo generously acknowledges). But his crucial argument that this therefore implies a transition in the period to a view of history as constructed in language (and hence of meaning in literature and history as disturbingly liable to fluctuation and change) runs into problems. If Valla does "see language both systematically and historically more as creating meaning than as containing it", any unsettling consequences of this view are mitigated for him by his explicit commitment to the view that his *Delegantia* is a

undertaken as part of a reconstruction of a historically ideal Latin – a perfectible tool for the pursuit of an elusive but ultimately attainable truth.

If as a vertiginous undertaking to try to weave together the intellectual histories of Latin humanism, historiography, and the vernacular literatures, there are the inevitable difficulties concerning fact and terminology caused by "cutting across and bringing together material from long-established and separate academic disciplines", to which Waswo himself draws attention. There is the danger too, that the author's own perceptiveness in one field – here Waswo's fine handling of vernacular writing – from Speroni to Shakespeare – may overshadow that of his selected sources in another (his commitment to Karl-Otto Apel's *Die Idee der Sprache* on relational semantics does not do his own thinking justice). This is an immensely learned, ambitious book, full of sharp insights and critical self-awareness. But Waswo's interrogation of "the semantic nuances of historical context" perhaps proves, in the end, too much of a part of the twentieth century to sustain.

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Another good man in Africa

Simon Rae

LINDSAY CLARKE
Sunday Whiteman
221pp. Cape. £10.95.
0224 024884

Eager to witness, and indeed to participate in, what Byron had anticipated as Africa's "first dance of... Freedom", Austin Palmer, protagonist of Lindsay Clarke's impressive first novel – it is skilfully constructed, economically written and ambitious in scope – takes a post in an up-country school in a newly independent West African state, bringing with him a wife and a boundless enthusiasm for the socialist ideals of his adoptive country. Things do not, however, go as Palmer planned. Living in the school compound in a clearing hacked out of the jungle puts enormous strains on the marriage. Palmer has his teaching, but his wife has nothing to distract her from the oppressive

monotony of the endless trees, "dense almost as a stockade". The couple grow further apart while trapped in a claustrophobic contiguity that ultimately becomes unbearable. They agree to separate, Palmer's wife returning to England.

Though essentially a psychological study of a man *in extremis*, the novel has a strong cast of closely observed secondary characters, and Clarke displays a fine ear for the rich diversity of speech-patterns thrown up by the expatriate and African communities. Africa itself is powerfully evoked as much more than a mere backdrop to Palmer's personal tragedy, and an important theme of the book is the degree to which it is possible for an outsider, however well-intentioned, to become integrated in an alien culture.

As a relief from the loneliness of his compound bungalow, Jalbout, a rich Lebanese timber merchant, offers Palmer a house in the town, which, after some hesitation, he accepts. While he is happy to benefit from Jalbout's generosity, he dislikes the older man's cynic-

ism regarding the new African order ("Education, development, progress... a united continent of free peoples... the old dark Africa safely illuminated with street-lighting. Not a bad dream") coupled with a conviction that the old Africa of witchcraft and sorcery still survives, with much of its original potency.

Once established in Jalbout's town house, Palmer meets, falls in love with and finally marries an African girl, Appaea, who to begin with at any rate brings him all the warmth and happiness missing from his first marriage. But Palmer's good fortune does not last. External events gradually begin to put pressure on the relationship. Tensions in the country at large – economic shortages, widespread corruption, and moves by the ruling Party to suppress all political opposition – are reflected in the school. When the sixth form mutinies and is expelled *en masse*, Palmer finds himself standing up to the local Party boss who is determined to have the pupils re-admitted. He clashes more seriously with the Party hierarchy over the arrest and imprisonment of Koranteng,

king of the tribal area, to whom Appaea's family owe loyalty. Koranteng has had the temerity to denounce the referendum establishing one-party rule. Palmer's protests on his behalf get him no more than a bloody nose and a night in the cells, but his faith in the Party is destroyed.

This refusal to stand by and acquiesce in what he sees as wrong has already put Palmer's relationship with Appaea under great strain. When an old woman is rejected by her family on suspicion of witchcraft and left out in the square to die, matters rapidly come to a head. Appaea, impatient with Palmer's purity of purpose, returns to her family, leaving the lone "Sunday Whiteman" – a traditional nickname for whites – to become increasingly obsessed with the slow death occurring right in front of his house. Despite the well-intentioned counsel he receives, Palmer's moral absolutism drives him to a gesture that can only appear a wilful madness to his friends and colleagues. But, Lindsay Clarke hints at the climax of his compelling personal quest, there is a glimmer of light at the heart of Palmer's darkness.

The Rathbones' family skeletons

Linda Taylor

LESLIE HALL PINDER
Under the House
183pp. Bloomsbury. £11.95.
07475 00657

Maude Mason (née Rathbone) – old Aunt Maude, aged seventy-one – remembers a past: a lonely childhood ("Maude is an oddie", she chanted); a strange family life on the plains of Saskatchewan. Leslie Hall Pinder's first novel opens in 1886, with a disturbed time scheme inside Maude's head: "Time was starting to melt and mix like a thick liquid." This melting and mixing continues as the novel develops: divisions occur according to dates – back to 1915 and 1924; then on to the late 1940s and 50s. Alongside Maude's life is juxtaposed that

of Evelyn, her "niece"; they are both family outsiders with suspect origins.

Maude's past is thick with resonances: such as the time when as a child she touched the "withered thing, soft on one side" in a bag of apples, in the cellar "under the house", and thought it was "the shrunken head of the first Maude" – a baby who had died in infancy but whose name she had been given, partly, it's later discovered, to legitimize her. This Maude, in fact, is the rotten one, the bad apple; she is the product of incest – between her father, known as S. D., and her sister, Isabel. Maude's genesis is a canker in the family which accounts for the reserve, the anger, the disturbing veneer of each of the Rathbones.

Curiously, the characters caught in this family dilemma (including Maude) are left in diagrammatic form, their reservations hanging in the Saskatchewan air. Leslie Hall Pinder has

another story to tell – about Evelyn. Evelyn is more conventionally illegitimate, but disliked, none the less, by her step-father, Stanley – the brother (and uncle) of Maude, who wants to write his sister/niece out of S. D.'s will, and who can't forgive himself for saving her once from a fire. Stanley, the monster step-father, conditions his wife into acquiescence, while Evelyn retreats into books and is sent to boarding school. There she meets a teacher who shows her how to feel emotions and who gets involved in a somewhat unlikely crisis at the centre of the book – Stanley's courtroom battle with Maude, who he claims has forced Evelyn to run away with her.

So there's a journey on a train, and a meeting with Isabel – tall, firm, enigmatic – who tells her story in a letter to Evelyn which, finally, writes the Rathbones out of the book. Isabel adds an eleventh-hour dimension to the

incest ("a dream I had one afternoon") and to the consequently intangible nature of Maude ("shaped entirely out of my imagination"). But Maude's insubstantiality, that was so vivid in the opening pages of the novel, has lost its impact: in imaginative terms Maude has been sacrificed to Evelyn.

Under the House is a forceful piece of writing, a novel packed with graphic images for characters – Miss Cloves (a predatory and ungainly teacher), for instance, who "looked like an animal trying to use her forelegs as arms". Although the incest paranoias is a little overworked, the book is tense with a body-in-the-cupboard kind of chill, and it manages to convey a sense of the Canadian mid-west without being provincial or sentimental. Pinder is a lavish and intriguing writer; the book is unsatisfying only in its apparent dislocation of intent.

Blacksnake's blues

Alan V. Hewat

J. J. PHILLIPS
Mojo Hand: An Orphic Tale
183pp. Serpent's Tail. Paperback, £5.95.
085242 109 6

While assisting with preparations for the cotillion at which she will make her debut, Eunice Prideaux, the teenage daughter of an affluent San Francisco Negro family, discovers a worn old record: "Bakershop Blues", by Blacksnake Brown and the Royal Sheiks. She puts it on the turntable. When she hears the raw, sexy song, and witnesses its effect, not only on her own

feelings but on the behaviour of a group of older black society women, Eunice understands that this music contains "some source of herself" which she must hunt down and come to terms with; under the spell of the blues, she leaves her world of white satin pumps and travels to the poor, black precincts of Raleigh, North Carolina, looking for Blacksnake Brown.

She finds him, moves in with him and enters the life which inspires his music and requires its solace, the life of America's black underclass. She goes to jail; she takes a job serving drinks in a whorehouse-cum-juke-joint; she becomes Blacksnake's lover and conceives his child. Subverted by the power of the blues, this liter-

ate, fair-skinned middle-class child sinks unre-sisting into the dire existence of the disenfranchised, and accepts without question a life stripped of amenity and adornment, a life of casual brutality and pain, in which there is nothing to justify the struggle of each day except the harsh pleasures of the night. In time, Blacksnake's blues become her own; Eunice learns to play and sing the blues, to live them, even celebrate them, for she realizes that she cannot escape them.

In *Mojo Hand*, J. J. Phillips has stood the Orpheus myth on its head, so that her Orpheus employs the enchantment of his music not to lead Eurydice out of the netherworld, but rather to lure her into it and then to hold her

there. The novel was first published in the United States in 1966 and has long been out of print; its republication is to be welcomed, for it contains not only a powerfully authentic and unsentimental depiction of black life in America, but also a penetrating, hypnotic exploration of the nature, meaning and function of the blues. In fact in its story, characters and language, *Mojo Hand* is itself a blues: blues at its most basic, telling of the human spirit animated by nothing more than the will to survive and find pleasure in survival. The life into which Eunice is drawn is as hard as life can be but even at its hardest it can be accepted and endured. It is redeemed by the humanity of those who live it, who have humour and vitality and a mother-wit determination to keep going, which implies that life's questions, and its misery, can somehow be resolved. That, precisely is the message of the blues, and in *Mojo Hand* J. J. Phillips has written it with surpassing artistry.

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marshmallows. The characters' emotions and social ambitions are driven by similarly erratic impulses, from Olive's fantasy of rearranging her friends – "Carol, for instance, could use some of Mrs Sanchez's embonpoint". It would loosen the girl up, make her a little less conceited while a slimmer Mrs Sanchez would have more self-confidence" – to Miss Undine's school lecture on the history of table napkins drawn entirely from biblical quotations. Wilcox avoids camp silliness by his superb sense of comic timing, and through modulations of tone he gives the characters' epiphanies and devastations due force without ridiculing them or cosmeticizing their venialities.

From Judy Abbott (of *Daddy Long-Legs* fame) to Nathan Zuckerman, from Leopold Bloom to Batman, Donald Duck to Lorna Doone, David Pringle's *Imaginary People* (518pp. Grafton. £14.95, 0 246 12968 9) brings together 1,200 famous names in a Who's Who of fictional characters culled from the past 250 years of novels, stories, plays, opera, ballet, film, comics, songs, radio and television.

Vincent Lawlor

JAMES WILCOX
Miss Undine's Living Room
275pp. Secker and Warburg. £10.95.
0436 57089 0

Tula Springs, Louisiana, has been the setting of James Wilcox's first two novels, and in his third, *Miss Undine's Living Room*, he returns to introduce a different social network consisting of the employees of its civic administration: (school, social services, courts and in particular, Mrs Olive Mackie, secretary to the Superintendent of Streets, Parks and Garbage. Wilcox takes on the tradition of making drama out of domestic crises while expanding the boundaries of what can be portrayed in this manner, in both social and emotional terms.

Miss Undine's Living Room is a comedy of interiors, its characters either tripping over objects of being trapped in the same room (or in Olive Mackie's case three consecutive supermarkets) with people one would, rather, not

meet. When Olive's uncle accidentally pushes Mr Versey, his home help, out of the window, the two are conflated. Uncle L.D.'s proximity to Mr Versey's death is used by various civic figures to further social and anti-social causes, their machinations and the eventual discovery of the real cause of Mr Versey's death ostensibly constituting the main plot. Although the dénouement is not what one would expect, the "public" plot is the weakest element in the novel, the absurdities encountered being slick and cynical rather than genuinely satirical.

They are external, though, to the real life of the novel, which builds up from its detail, and expresses Wilcox's exasperated delight in the constructions and perversities of small-town life, its contingency on and fetishizing of domestic ephemera. He delights in the misguided energies invested in the naming of "Weight Watchers Quiescently Frozen Connection", in the voices of shopgirls from Sonny Boy's Bargain Store that reach Uncle L.D.'s apartment above through the sink, and drive Olive's husband to concoct a dish of pineapples and mashed potato topped with browned

John Sturrock

On the mystic map

Stephen Bann

ROBERT PINGET
L'Ennemi
194pp. Paris: Minuit, 65fr.
The Apocrypha
Translated by Barbara Wright
143pp. New York: Red Dust, \$12.95.
0873760506

Robert Pinget has always been scrupulous about the way in which his writings have been described. *L'Apocryphe*, published in 1980 and now available in an excellent English translation by Barbara Wright, was the last to be formally accredited as a novel. *Monsieur Songe* (1982) was characterized in an authorial foreword as a "divertissement". "Pendant une vingtaine d'années", wrote Pinget, "je me suis délassé de mon travail en écrivaint les histoires de monsieur Songe." The diversion continued with the two delightful but slight supplements to the diary of Monsieur Songe, *Le Harmonis* (1984) and *Charrue* (1985). Evidently these were marginal notes to a manuscript that still refused obstinately to materialize and authenticate the writer as a novelist. There is a rather desperate note in *Charrue* which records: "Si on le forçait sous peine de mort à exposer en quelques pages les grands traits d'un roman qu'est-ce qu'il écrirait?"

Whether the threat of death was applied or not, *L'Ennemi* has now appeared, and it bears the description of a "roman". It also carries the dates 1984-7 and the place-name of Sirany on the final page, which suggests that the author has been a long time in bringing it to comple-

tion. (But be careful - you will not find Sirany on any map of provincial France; it belongs to the mythic cartography which Pinget has successively elaborated from the stage of his earliest stories, which took place "Between Fantôme and Agapa".) *L'Ennemi* is certainly Pinget's most substantial piece of writing since *L'Apocryphe*, and it has already been treated to a celebratory reception in Paris, where a much-lauded production of one of his earlier plays coincided with its recent publication. No doubt it came as a shock to many critics to realize that Pinget's best-known novel, *L'Inquisiteur*, is already a quarter of a century old, and that he has been writing away ever since, as the *nouveau roman* has completed its metamorphosis from high literary fashion to approved examination material.

To those who have stayed with Pinget over this period, and to those who have intermittently returned to his work, *L'Ennemi* will not appear to break any new ground as far as its subject matter is concerned. An elderly man ("le maître") is still trying to gather his papers together into some sort of order. A male servant still provides a garrulous commentary on his master's habits, while a ne'er-do-well nephew and a disgraced secretary (or are they perhaps the same person?) make the atmosphere pungent with the sense of affection misplaced or not reciprocated. A vagrant gipsy (there he is nicknamed "Sirocco") from time to time relieves the gloom. But is he perhaps involved in the kidnapping and murder of the son of one of the farmers, an incident which the police have never managed to clear up, and which remains one of "the master's" most insistent preoccupations?

All these elements recur in *L'Ennemi*. Or, to put it more exactly, they recur as a set of systematic, though slight, variations on the given theme. The milieu is at once specific, since it is subjected to the minutest descriptions, and impossible to pin down; how can we be sure that this is the manor, or the town-house where an event took place, when we are continually being reminded that the narrator's memory is liable to be at fault? How can we decide whether the judge had an apoplectic fit, or simply sprained his ankle on arriving at the master's house, and whether the cook was indeed about to put the guinea-fowl in the oven? Of course, we cannot make any such decision. But all these possibilities exist within a régime of overall verisimilitude, and it is our fate, as we read, to be persuaded first in one direction and then in another.

To this extent, Pinget is exploiting what has been the constant resource of the story-teller. He is artfully questioning the simple-minded assumption that there was, indeed, a straightforward story to be told, and that any confusion has only come about as a result of the vagaries of the "point of view". It is not simply that he gives us an "unreliable narrator". In fact, the persona of his narrator is already that of a writer who sees fiction as a necessary failure, measured against the simplicity of the messages he wishes to send. In *Charrue*, Monsieur Songe replies to the quoted question about what he would write in these terms: "Spon-tanément une histoire d'amour lui paraîtrait indispensable mais n'ayant aucune expérience en la matière il s'ingénierait à l'évoquer entre les lignes, par vagues allusions aussiôt démenties, dans un discours relatif à autre chose."

Yet this kind of comment is unlikely to win any new readers for Pinget. Nor does it convey what is the most distinctive aspect of *L'Ennemi*, as it was with *L'Apocryphe*. This is the manifestation (if that is the word) of a theological dimension which breaks through into the quotidian realm. Like the angel in Giotto's Arena Chapel, who folds back the blue curtain of the sky and lets Paradise appear through a chink, Pinget opens his fictive world up to the intimations of grace. It is, of course, through the manipulation of different levels of language that this effect occurs. In *L'Ennemi*, the most telling sign is the series of quotations from the office hymn sung at Compline, "Te lucis ante terminum". From this we have "Noctium phantasmata" and "Procul recedant somnia"; and from a similar source, "Horridas nostrae mentis purga tenebras", and "Accende lumen sensibus". In response to these fragmentary prayers, Pinget gives us as an affirmation only the single, but repeated word "Motus". It would, however, be reasonable to fill the textual lacuna: *Motus (cordis)*.

Here is a hermetic Pinget emerging through the interstices of the tales of provincial life. It is not surprising to find that the master is a student of Hermes Psychopompus. In fact, the title of *L'Ennemi* must refer not simply to the force of disorder which stops the narrative voice from collecting its thoughts together ("Mémoire ennemie") but to "your old adversary the Devil". Doubtless Pinget's scribal activity is continuing. It is already obvious, however, that he reserves the title of novel only for those pieces of writing whose mythic richness and density of texture is very great indeed.

Ravages of the day

John Taylor

ALEXANDROS PAPADIAMANTIS
Tales from a Greek Island
Translated by Elizabeth Constantinides
176pp. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, £13.30.
080813337

With the exception of Nikos Kazantzakis, Greek fiction writers, classic and contemporary, are rarely (and never extensively) translated into English. This neglect, which contrasts with the world-wide popularity of several outstanding Greek poets, is reason enough to applaud a translation of twelve short stories by Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851-1911), the "saint" of modern Greek letters. But in Greece the interest of Papadiamantis's work is considered to lie well beyond his place in literary history. Ever since his lifetime a battle has been fought over the technical shortcomings of his novels, novellas and short stories (professors of literature generally squaring off against the dozens of poets and writers who from the very beginning have championed him), but in the last few years, with the publication of an exemplary critical edition by N. D. Triantafyllopoulos, a consensus of approval seems at last to have formed and academic interest in his work to have grown. In Greece Papadiamantis is now considered to be a writer of no less importance than C. P. Cavafy or George Seferis, both of whom were among his early admirers.

The problems involved in translating a writer such as Papadiamantis are, however, formidable. Like his near contemporaries Emmanuel Roddis (1836-1904) and Georgios Vizyinos (1849-1896), Papadiamantis generally wrote in *katharevousa*, a "purist" Greek so distant from the standard demotic that a Greek reader today will struggle through words, phrases and even passages in his stories. Moreover, in dialogue Papadiamantis sought to reflect the dialect of his native island, Skiathos, somewhat in the manner of Mark Twain, an author whom he had translated into Greek. His prose was further enriched by the use of Byzantine ecclesiastical Greek and even ancient Greek. It was Papadiamantis's startling mastery of the Greek language that made the selection of Greek writers.

For the translator, the problems are no less formidable. Once he has translated the stories, he must choose a style. Papadiamantis wrote in

with graphic realism and unequalled passion about the extreme hardships of the day, the ravages of tuberculosis and alcoholism, the plight of women abandoned by their husbands and sons. Other stories, more personal in tone, have a quality of reverie, the author recollecting his childhood in Skiathos while eeking out his living in Athens as so many islanders and provincials of his generation had to do. Also present in Papadiamantis's writing is an undeniable mythical or biblical dimension, and in her introduction to this translation Elizabeth Constantinides observes that long before James Joyce, the Greek author "had used myth as an organizing principle" for the plots of stories such as "The American", "Love the Harvester" and "The Haunted Bridge". Stories such as "The Homesick Wife" and "A Dream among the Waters" are marked in turn by a delicate, voyeuristic eroticism. "The Matchmaker" depicts a shy narrator, tortured by religious guilt, who longs in vain for an inaccessible sweetheart. Constantinides compares Papadiamantis to Thomas Hardy, Alphonse Daudet, Theodor Storm and Giovanni Verga, while his penetrating exploration of religion, superstition and evil in a tightly knit village community may also recall Nathaniel Hawthorne. No Greek author, as the translator remarks, has created such an abundance of characters, plots and settings.

Though Constantinides's faithful translation is readable throughout, it is less convincing in the dialogues than in the strictly narrative sections. The use of a contraction or a colloquialism alone does not suffice to render the folksy Skiathos dialect; a syntax reflecting that of colloquial speech must also be employed. Another serious fault is that the paragraph breaks in the Triantafyllopoulos edition are rarely respected; several (typically) short paragraphs in the original will systematically be glued together into one long, cumbersome one in the translation. For this reason the tempo lags at times. The author's notorious digressions, mercurial descriptions and repetitions, which in the short paragraphs of the original take on a curious logic all their own - the natural detours and recapitulations of the engaging story-teller - become less digestible in the English. But Elizabeth Constantinides is to be commended for translating twelve of Papadiamantis's best and most famous tales, for though three English versions of his novella *The Murders* (1903) have recently appeared, nearly all of his 170 short stories remain untranslated. *Charrue*

H. G. Koenigsberger

VIRGILIO TITONE
Vecchie e nuove storie siciliane
171pp. Palermo: Herbita.
Le notti della Kalsa di Palermo
255pp. Palermo: Herbita.

Although Virgilio Titone has written some excellent books on history, sociology, culture and ideas, he has not, so far, been translated into English. Now, at over eighty years of age, Titone has had a second collection of short stories as well as his first novel published in Italy.

Vecchie e nuove storie siciliane centre on real events and present the thoughts and feelings of ordinary Sicilians caught in a web of social traditions and moral assumptions which will inevitably lead to disaster but from which they cannot escape. Some of Titone's evocations are intentionally comic, as that of the drunkard, alone in a village from which all other inhabitants have fled during an earthquake, who sees a horse without rider or coachman, drawing a hearse to the cemetery; but in general, his verismo is tinged with pervasive melancholy, the melancholy of an author who understands the historical reasons for characteristic Sicilian attitudes such as the overwhelming need to inspire respect, coupled with an unwillingness to reveal one's feelings, and hence one's personal integrity, to outsiders. "In Sicily among true men one speaks in allusions and in more or less veiled discourse... especially when one wants to give advice to a friend: for giving advice means taking responsibility, and the respect due both to oneself and to one's friend demands this constant allusiveness."

Le notti della Kalsa di Palermo is based on events which occurred between 1979 and 1982. From police reports and court records, and from interviews with many of the characters who appear pseudonymously in the novel, Titone has constructed a modern-picaresque novel. The Kalsa is a district in old Palermo, near the port. It has remained untouched by tourism or by the building boom which has taken place on the outskirts of the city, but it is very much part of the inner-city decay which is characteristic of Palermo as of so many other European centres. The teenage boys and young men of this district, like the classic picaresque prototypes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, survive by their wits on the

margins of society, their view of life coloured by American films such as *The Godfather*, and by stories from true-romance magazines. Gianni dreams of becoming a pirate captain or the leader of a band which smashes the Mafia-controlled hard-drug rings but which, because one has to be practical, would finance itself from the sale of cannabis, "because that doesn't do anyone any harm". Nino, younger and less ambitious but almost as romantic, would like to go to sea, but his parents forbid this and oblige him to go to Amsterdam where his father has started a pizzeria. When the oven blows up and kills the parents he returns to Palermo to look for his elder sister who has disappeared.

As in most picaresque novels, the story line is episodic and diffuse, although the last four thriller-like chapters, which describe Nino and Gianni's search for the kidnapped girl, are extremely exciting. Also in the picaresque tradition, the novel's main interest lies in the picture it presents of a particular society. Titone's dialogue rings true: each of his many characters, who range from the most sinister Mafia hitman to the innocent Nino, is seen from within. Even Don Peppino, who first appears as a stereotypical criminal boss, controlling an underground empire of corruption whether in or out of prison, is shown to be a believable person without recourse to sentimental gimmicks such as the heart of gold under a rough exterior.

Titone gives us a Sicily in which the great majority of its inhabitants try to live honestly and peacefully. Much money has been channelled into the island and much of the worst poverty of even a "generation ago" has disappeared. Yet large numbers of people who are unemployed or have to depend on low salaries or wages still see little chance of bettering their position except by doing minor jobs for the Mafia and other gangs. Most of all their existence is one of fear and distrust: for the Mafia has its agents and allies in the police and among politicians, and even the former Mafia codes of honour have been forgotten. Virgilio Titone draws his often taciturn and inarticulate characters with assurance; he is very explicit about their habits and appetites, especially sexual ones. Just as in the short stories, his is a verismo based on sympathy and understanding of the human condition, and in *Le notti della Kalsa di Palermo* it is also based on acute and un sentimental observation of the changes which have occurred in Sicily in the past twenty years.

In the monarchic minefield

John Register

JAMES C. RILEY
The Seven Years War and the Old Régime in France: The economic and financial toll
251pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press.
£21.70.

0691054886
GEORGE ARMSTRONG KELLY
Mortal Politics in Eighteenth-century France
334pp. Waterloo, Ontario: Waterloo University Press.
08898071 X

BAILEY STONE
The French Parlements and the Crisis of the Old Régime
324pp. Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press. £29.75.
0807817015

MICHEL ANTOINE
Le dur Métier de roi
343pp. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
185fr.
210309801

The year of the Capetian millennium draws to its close after producing a number of surprises, not the least being the recognition by the French Republic of its meriting an official celebration; the increase in the number of pretenders to the French Crown from one to three does not, however, indicate a proportionate increase in the chances of a monarchical restoration. The millennium has been chiefly an occasion to re-evaluate the lasting achievements of the Valois and the Bourbons. Inevitably, the view that the kings unified and centralized the nation has been much stressed, thereby setting the course of scholarship back by almost fifty years. The traditional continuities have been stressed at the expense of the exceptions and the differences. Because they focus our attention on the contradictions

and complexities of the *ancien régime*, these four books may perhaps act as a corrective.

Two different historical traditions are represented here. Michel Antoine brings his archivist's training and long familiarity with the records and institutions of the monarchy into play; whereas James Riley and George Armstrong Kelly are high conceptualists. Like their colleagues of the *Annales* school, these *hommes à systèmes*, as they would have been dubbed in the eighteenth century, tend to view the *ancien régime* as a social and political minefield ready to explode at any moment. Bailey Stone hesitates between the two traditions and is lost.

Riley's is the most challenging work. The author believes that the discourse of Revolution prospered long before 1789: "in terms of ideas and rhetoric France seems to have been ready for a revolution around 1760". But, of course, he concedes, the Revolution did not happen, though a study of economic and fiscal issues explains why it did not occur then but later. From the outset one's confidence is shaken not so much by the author's mistaken belief that Cardinal de Fleury was *contrôleur général* of the Finances, but by the outrageous statement that "the relevant French documents" were destroyed "in archival fires", thus forcing the author to depend largely on foreign sources. What of the papers of *contrôleur général* Bertin readily available in Paris, or the records of his department in the Archives Nationales, or again of the memoranda on finance in the archives of the Foreign Ministry? Riley has been fortunate that his foreign sources turn out to be relatively reliable. He is able to produce lists of figures for governmental revenue and expenditure and to trace the impact of the Seven Years War on them. The government of Louis XV decided to finance the war by credit rather than by taxes. Riley is keen to show that, with the government increasingly in debt, there came a debate at the

end of the war on ways of reforming the *ancien régime* which did not achieve anything because "to reform the old régime in the ways suggested was to abolish it altogether". Nobody wanted that.

Unfortunately, the belated discovery that nobody wanted to destroy the old régime fails to satisfy the conceptualists, busily cursing their mine-detectors as they enter an almost tranquil Arcadian scene worthy of Watteau or Fragonard. They will have none of it. Balked of his revolution in the 1760s, Riley lamely admits that his would-be revolutionaries - King or *parlements* - "only articulated an impasse", and he arrives at the perverse conclusion that "the revolutionaries of 1763 were the old régime". There is perhaps a simpler explanation: the *ancien régime* was alive and well in 1763; in any case, within three years (and unrecorded in the book), a war deficit of some 16 millions had been reduced to just under 3 millions, leaving France free to fight another war under Louis XVI. Nevertheless, Riley has raised an important question even if he has not tackled it: why could the financial crisis of 1786-89 not have been resolved like the earlier ones?

Kelly's concern is more with "the multiple modes of dying in relation to political authority". The death of rebels or assassins, death in battle or in a duel, death viewed from a religious, a legal, or a medical angle, or depicted in art or literature, are examined here. If the link which he tries to establish between death and politics is perhaps overloaded, and his view that the context was one of "the shifting of the ground of normative political sovereignty from a hidden god to a mythical society" a little banal, Kelly succeeds in exploring the shadowy groves of our Arcadia. His book contains several fascinating chapters, especially those dealing with the death penalty and with musical compositions - "the Music of Mortality". He makes a telling observation on the hideous execution of Damiens: "Louis XV was not a cruel king, but he was very sincerely per-

suaded that an attack on him was an attack on God... which no circumstances could extenuate, and that there was no right to clemency." His source here is Sanson, the last of the hereditary executioners of the *ancien régime*.

Those hoping for an answer to Riley's question, for a new or convincing explanation of the collapse of the *ancien régime*, will not find it in Bailey Stone's leaden work, despite, or perhaps because of, its indebtedness to the work and notes of the late Jean Egret. His argument is that the Paris *parlementaires* of 1787-8 saw themselves as articulating "popular" as well as "dominant class" interests against the Crown. Mines like these were detonated years ago. The book has a soporific effect, one's last conscious recollection being perhaps of the full names of Caze de la Bove or of the thoughts of Theda Stenopol.

Upon waking up, one reaches for Antoine's lively volume of essays, gathered together under the misleading title of *Le dur Métier de roi*. It was time that these pieces were brought out of hiding. Antoine is the foremost scholar working on the governmental institutions of the period. His essays on the *subdélégués*, on the *règlement des tailles*, or on the vexed question of the annuities by the Royal Council of the sovereign decisions of the *parlements*, are significant contributions to our knowledge of the workings of the monarchy, even if they do not quite fulfil the promise of the title and if, at times, the evidence might sustain a contrary argument. He reveals a lighter touch, too, in his article, surely definitive, on the bastards of Louis XV, first published, appropriately enough, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. It is difficult to fault such painstaking scholarship, although in the essay on Louis XV's will, Antoine has overlooked an obvious piece of evidence pointing to its authenticity: the published memoirs of Papillon de la Ferté. Antoine clearly enjoys the *ancien régime* and relishes the task of explaining its intricate mechanisms; he is obviously on the side of the Arcadians.

Questions to be asked

M. S. Anderson

ROBERT GILDEA
Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914
498pp. Oxford University Press. £27.50 (paperback, £9.95).
0198730284

There are many single-volume histories of nineteenth-century Europe; but the vastness of the subject, and the inexhaustible stream of new writing on every aspect of it, mean that they need to be frequently remodelled and updated. This volume in the Short Oxford History of the Modern World series is the latest attempt to fulfil this essential but far from easy task. It has some important virtues. At the bread-and-butter level it includes an impressive amount of detailed information, a good deal of it not to be found in its more obvious competitors. Robert Gildea has cast his net widely; there are interesting details here on the development of mass-circulation newspapers and spectator sports, to mention only two examples, and the book conveys a generally convincing impression of the variety and heterogeneity of life in a continent where conditions differed so widely over a relatively small geographical area, and where deeply rooted traditional attitudes lived on side by side with new radical ambitions and revolutionary impulses.

Of the three chronological divisions into which it falls, the middle one, covering the generation 1850-80, is that in which the touch seems surest. In the relatively detailed account of German unification, and in the corresponding one for Italy, an unusual and welcome amount of attention is given to the internal politics of the countries concerned - for example to the strength of anti-Prussian feeling in the south German States after 1866 and the difficulties this caused Bismarck. The discussion of the Ausgleich of 1867 in the Habsburg Empire is more informative than is usual in a book of this scope, and there are some suggestive comments on the position of the Catholic Church in the increasingly powerful secular states of the later nineteenth century. There is also a welcome willingness to bridge some of the

lesser and secondary States into the picture; Spain in particular, usually almost totally ignored in accounts of this kind, receives more adequate treatment here.

Nevertheless there are important reservations to be made. Every book of this kind is, by its very nature, open to the criticism that it has omitted something important. The problems of balance and completeness, of deciding what to include and what relative weight to give to the different issues and problems which clamour for a share of very limited space, can never be completely solved. However here some of the weaknesses of this kind seem marked. This is particularly so where some of the broadest issues - the great intellectual and emotional forces which swept so much of Europe as the nineteenth century progressed and formed the background, and in some cases the foundation, to political events - are concerned. Nationalism, inevitably, is frequently alluded to. But nowhere is it discussed in any depth in its own right; its origins, the factors which helped it to spread, the degree to which it had practical effect in different parts of the Continent, are never analysed. Socialism receives more extended treatment; but this is in the form of essentially narrative discussion of the ups and downs of socialist parties in individual countries. There is little effort to treat it at any length as a system, or systems, of ideas.

It is in fact in the discussion of ideas that the book often seems weakest. It is surprising in a substantial volume of this kind to see so little attention given to Saint-Simon, whose influence for a generation or more was so widespread and important; the non-Marxist varieties of socialism get short shrift, and even Marx's ideas and the way in which they altered over time are never treated at any length.

This is, in other words, a somewhat conventional book. In spite of its often perceptive discussion of demographic and economic issues and the almost inevitably more bitty treatment of cultural developments, it is built around a traditional framework of political narrative, though one which is solid and well done. It is often highly, and in general reliably, informative. But it does not ask questions, or when it does it fails to press them insistently enough.

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ANDRE DEUTSCH

Living and dying in the ring

E. S. Turner

ELLIOTT J. GORN
The Manly Art: Bare-knuckle prize fighting in America
316pp. Cornell University Press, \$27.45
08014 19204

In 1842 a flotilla of twelve steamboats laden with the prize-fighting fancy headed up the Hudson from New York to the site of a bare-knuckle encounter. It was a festive outing, none the worse for being illegal, and the fancy were to get their money's worth. Tom McCoy, the "elegantly proportioned" Irishman, was aglow with man-like grace and his "swelling breast curved out like a cuirass". His opponent Lilly had a form which was "round almost to perfection: his sides, instead of branching from the waist, gradually outwards to the armpits, circled convulsively inwards like reversed crescents..." (a bit confusing, but American sports writers tried to transcend that "bobbish" style which talked of "tapping the claret", "closing the ogle" and "scattering the ivories").

The two men fought 119 rounds in two hours and forty-one minutes. Then McCoy, having

been knocked down eighty times, collapsed and drowned, literally, in such blood as remained in him - "the image of God transformed into a livid and loathsome rum" (Horace Greeley, *New York Tribune*). Lilly fled to England, the promoter "Yankee" Sullivan was briefly gaoled and the press, which had always deplored prize-fighting while copiously reporting it, slavered with moral outrage. The prize-fighting craze had been imported from England, where it had enjoyed the patronage of raffish "Corinthians". It had not yet obtained a firm grip on the New World and the Roman death of an excessively brave man set the sport back several years, which is more than a death in the ring is likely to do today.

How much of it was honest butchery, how much a male aesthetic, such as appealed to *Hazlitt* and *Borrow*? Elliott J. Gorn, an academic at Miami University, brings to the subject "the methods of social history, folklore, anthropology and sociology", which is less alarming than it sounds. He would have us know that he is no despoiler of raw valour, tending to take the part of the lions against the Christians.

Bare-knuckle fights excited orgies of special pleading, humbug and hypocrisy. American critics said pugilism undermined not only Christian but republican values, betrayed the

nobility of human nature and mocked the law of subordination, not to mention the law of the land. Defenders argued that it discouraged the English vice of effeminacy, helped a man to defend himself and punish insolence; it was a far better way of satisfying honour or upholding ethnic pride than the duelling pistol or the bowie knife.

And the fancy? Were they unregenerate riff-raff, addicts of the lower blood sports, or, as Gorn says, "a saloon-based bachelor sub-culture" dedicated to "companionship and human connectedness", despising domesticity, cherishing "the old values of mutuality, reciprocity, loyalty to kin and community, blood-lust, prowess and honour"? Bloodlust sits uneasily in that catalogue of virtues, but it was there all right.

After the Civil War, prize-fighting revived, fuelled, it may be, by the desire of that bachelor sub-culture to shock the bourgeoisie and the evangelicals. The author is keen also to show that the profit system contributed to this uppity behaviour. For the downtrodden of capitalism the ring held out the dream of beating anyone in the world, or, in Gorn's words, the chance to rise from "the tangle of corporate enmeshments to the throbbing heart of life". Or to a damaged brain.

The last bare-knuckle fight, still illegal, was

staged in 1889 between John L. Sullivan, "the greatest American hero of the late nineteenth century", and Jake Kilrain. Unlike "Yankee" Sullivan, John L. escaped gaol, his fame being such as to overawe the judiciary. A high-spirited, fast-living champion, the "Boston Boy" offered to "lick any son-of-a-bitch alive", provided the son-of-a-bitch was white. Oddly, his challenge to all comers in 1892, as reproduced here, omits the proviso "I will never fight a negro. I never have and I never shall." Possibly Gorn, who is of course aware of the colour bar then prevailing, is quoting from an edited version. Sullivan's well-paid displays, along with his performances as a battling blacksmith in the play *Honest Hearts and Willing Hands*, raised him almost to millionaire status. The song which went "Let me shake the hand that shook the hand of Sullivan" said it all. His apotheosis ushered in the age of boxing as a legal and highly organized commercial entertainment.

Elliott Gorn has read prodigiously in his field, drawing not only on works of "boxiana" and "fistiana" but on *bracing organs* like the *National Police Gazette*. There are fifty pages of notes. At his most sociological he can be stiff going, and repetitious, but the story of how the fancy became fans is a substantial contribution to American popular history.

Bouncing off the ropes

Paul Smith

MICHAEL B. POLIAKOFF
Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, violence, and culture
202pp. Yale University Press, £16.95
030037686

JOHN HARDING with JACK KID BERG
Jack Kid Berg: The Whitechapel Windmill
256pp. Robson, £11.95
08051 4412

THOMAS HAUSER
The Black Lights: Inside the world of professional boxing
257pp. Robson, £10.95
08051 4439

JOYCE CAROL OATES
On Boxing
118pp. Bloomsbury, £9.95
07475 10363

Michael Poliakoff sees the function of combat sports in the early Greek world as being to contribute to the stability of the *polis* by supplying its mainly patrician champions with a harmless substitute for the violent emulation of the warrior heroes of epic poetry, which was being rendered increasingly unavailable to them in war by the collective discipline of the hoplite phalanx and in politics by democratic prejudice against over-powerful citizens. Readers of John Harding, Thomas Hauser, and Joyce Carol Oates on boxing - for the Greeks the most punishing of contexts - are unlikely to credit modern combat sport with such basic political usefulness and certainly not with so aristocratic a personnel. Boxing's deliberate exploitation of ethnic rivalry (most often, in the United States, Hispanic versus black) does not look like a contribution to communal harmony. The men in the professional ring are not sublimating the instincts - though they may be echoing the values - of a hereditary elite but like as not taking one of the classic routes out of the mean streets and the ghettos by honing the survival skills those environments develop, a pattern well exemplified in the career of Jack Kid Berg, chronicled by Harding, and in the rise of Billy Costello to the World Boxing Council superlightweight title, which forms the thread of Hauser's *The Black Lights*.

Harding is not much helped by his subject's "I was a terror" line in unrelenting frankness, but he sketches a little of the social context (with tantalizing flashes of what the display of supreme fighting spirit by a boxer with the star of David on his trunks meant to the Jewish community in Britain) and by contrast the unrelenting blood - that is, power - of the professional windmill in the ring and out of it. At first small, proud, and confident of force, he was not harder bitten caught up with

him. Hauser, with an occasional dive into sub-Chandlerese ("His fat companion chomped on a cigar that reeked with a stale bowel movement"), uses Costello's progress to explore boxing in the United States, which he sees as an industry organized to meet the demands of television programming, the dominant figures promoters like Don King, who claims to have read Homer, Aristotle, Shakespeare and Freud in gaol (a prison term being a rite of passage which many boxers undergo and most promoters evidently should), and whose ego he jacks the book. The fight game which both authors describe is not notable for that taste for style and skill which made it natural for the Greeks to find in Apollo, patron of music and art, the god of boxing. Kid Berg made big news and big money precisely when, in his first encounter in the States, he learned to jettison his upright English stance and classy left lead for non-stop roughhousing ("Found!", ran a headline, "British Fighter Who Can Fight!").

But the contrast between the noble antique and the squalid modern is easy to overdraw. Emphasizing the Greeks' obsession with winning, Poliakoff remarks that "expecting the palaestra at any time to correspond to the playing fields of Eton will lead us into deep confusion". The notion that the One Great Scorer would be interested only in how you played the game would have seemed absurd to a pankratiast, biting and gouging against the rules in order to gain the verdict. Ancient combat sport

Joining the club

Mark Bonham Carter

IVOTENNANT
Frank Worrell: A biography
121pp. Cambridge: Lutterworth, £12.95
07188 26132
DAVID LEMMON
Cricket Mercenaries: Overseas players in English cricket
167pp. Pavilion, £10.95
185145 134X

Frank Worrell must be counted one of the giants of post-war cricket, not only because of his rare skills as bowler, batsman and captain, but also because he was an architect of the recent dominance of West Indies teams. Ivot Tennant's biography is therefore greatly to be welcomed. It records meticulously Worrell's life and achievements. He was the greatest of the three "W's" from Barbados, the first black captain of the West Indies, a political victory conspicuously achieved. He was a great figure beyond the Caribbean, where he died, covered in glory, at the tragically early age of forty-two. The facts are accurately recorded from his

was often more savage and potentially brutalizing to the spectator than the modern variety, especially when it degenerated into the blood spectacle of the Roman gladiatorial arena. On a deeper level, too, the underlying meaning of combat sport has not changed much across the centuries.

"Boxing is fundamentally about anger", writes Joyce Carol Oates, in a series of essays (elegantly packaged by Bloomsbury Publishing), whose neat perceptions only occasionally threaten to bounce off the ropes into the intellectual stratosphere ("The referee's dramatic count of ten constitutes a metaphysical parenthesis of a kind through which the fallen boxer must penetrate if he hopes to continue in time"). Prizefighting may have some stabilizing social function in channelling a part of the impotent anger of the poor and the disadvantaged into the entertainment industry. But its social significance goes far beyond that. According to Oates, the anger that it liberates and transforms is the product of universal as well as particular malaise: it is the reaction of humanity to the contracting scope allowed by civilization for the direct physical discovery and affirmation of identity, so that, for instance, the rise in boxing's popularity in America in the 1920s "can be seen as a consequence of the diminution of the individual vis-à-vis society, the gradual attrition of personal freedom, will, and strength".

"The highest form of individualism there

youth at Roebuck Elementary School, where the motto was "Manners maketh Man" (very Bajan), to his degree at Manchester University in 1939, his captaincy of the famous Australian Tour of 1960 and the 1963 Tour, when his West Indies team beat England by three to one. But the man has to be discovered between the interstices of the facts and Tennant's biography suffers in comparison with two essays on Worrell by the incomparable C. R. L. James in *Cricket*, a collection of his cricket writings (recently republished, and reviewed in the TLS of September 25). There the facts are used to throw light on the nature of the man and the cricketer and to illuminate the importance of his background. He places him, in his own words, "historically".

Cricket Mercenaries appears to be the first book devoted to examining the role of overseas players in English cricket. As such, it makes an important contribution to the history of the game, even if it is a trifle disappointing that David Lemmon, having recorded the history of overseas players, and weighed the pros and cons of their presence, fails to reach a conclusion about whether they have helped or hindered the English game and makes no sugges-

is", Harding quotes the trainer, Ray Arcel, as saying, "Boxing is not a natural human activity, or even, Oates suggests, a sport. It is an irrational testing of the self to destruction, 'primarily' (Oates again) 'about being, and not giving, hurt'. Boxers, Hauser shows us, know that what they are doing is, coolly and sensibly considered, crazy. Yet, in the rigid discipline, precise aim, and constant probing of physical and mental limits which it involves, some of them find a destined fulfilment: 'One day on the heavy bag, and it was like God saying to me, this is what you're supposed to do', said Billy Costello. Boxers exhibit in metaphor on a public stage the contestatory character of all human development and achievement: both Oates and Poliakoff quote Nietzsche's 'Every talent must unfold itself in fighting'. As Theogenes of Thasos acquired posthumous divinity, so the Dempseys and the Marcianos are accorded a kind of immortality in *The Ring's* "Hall of Fame", because they are heroes of elemental life. "In the brightly lit ring", Oates concludes, "man is in *extremis*, performing an atavistic rite or *agon* for the mysterious sake of those who can participate only vicariously in such drama, the drama of life in the flesh. Boxing has become America's tragic theater." Perhaps that claims too much, or perhaps it is peculiar to America. Those brought up on the British variety are bound to hope that the odyssey of existence is not quite reducible to a fifteen-round contest.

tions as to how these matters might be ordered better.

Ever since 1877 overseas professionals and amateurs have played cricket in England and for England. There was little hostility towards the practice until the turn of the century and then it was directed at professionals, not amateurs. From that day to this, one of the main problems has been to define an overseas player. At least eight English captains have been born overseas. Consequently, the regulations have changed as frequently as our immigration laws, inspired by the same principle: some is good, too many is bad. But what constitutes too many? For an account of how this controversy developed and where things now stand, Lemmon's book is essential reading.

Historic Golf Courses of the British Isles by Bernard Darwin (253pp. Duckworth, £14.95. 0 7156 2173 4) is a reprint of the author's 1910 survey in which he delivers shrewd judgment on famous and obscure golf-courses of the day. At Hinkley Darwin "spent some not wholly unpleasant afternoons... squelching through the mud and trying vainly to hole putts by cannoning off alternate wormcasts".

Simply entertaining

Brian McCabe

There are many well-meaning people who believe they could dash off, without too much trouble, a good book for young children, who have not yet learned to read, especially parents who have successfully entertained or sedated their own children with impromptu stories. Yet I suspect that they expect a great deal from the books they buy - that they should entertain, certainly, but also that they should stimulate the imagination and educate. One of the difficulties of writing and illustrating a book for young children is to teach and entertain without condescension.

Cat Goes Fiddle-I-fee is a prime example of a simple children's book formula: a familiar rhyme naming beasts and what the beasts say is rendered simplistic by adult distortion. Paul Galdone's illustrations are amateurish in feel and misleading - I thought cows and horses had given up wearing false eyelashes in the late 1960s. *My Dog* and *My Cat* also opt for simplicity, each book providing a few basic examples of the animal's habits and antics. Though they are harmless and tastefully illustrated, they are rather limited in scope and unlikely to yield more from rereading. Even a very young child could get to know these books quickly and grow bored with them.

Ann Rockwell's *Come to Town* is a conscientious if somewhat dull attempt to find order in a modern, urban environment and present this in such a way that a young child will understand it. The book shows the interiors of a supermarket, an office, a library and a school, and the teddy-bear people who inhabit them do all sorts of sensible modern things: they file letters, point to charts, talk on the telephone, look at the notice board, use computers and watch videos. They do these everyday things with teddy-bear imperturbability. I kept wishing one of them would do something that wasn't sensible (even if only suggesting a picnic in the woods). Don't teddy-bear people know how to enjoy themselves any more? The work ethic is laid on with a trowel in *The Happy Digger*, but at least Digger, Dump Truck and Cement Mixer have the *joie de vivre* to go for a dip in the swimming pool once they've built it.

Unfortunately, the illustrations are uniformly mundane.

Mr McGee by Pamela Allen is a refreshing and inspirational tale by comparison. It is the story of an eccentric character who lives under a tree and is transformed into a human balloon. He is just beginning to enjoy his floating existence when he is brought down to earth by a bird with a sharp beak. Though it is a simple tale simply told, it has a vital spark of magic. Pamela Allen shows that simple language need not be banal. *Do Not Disturb* is another unusual and imaginative story. Although there is no text beyond the initial "It was the first day of summer...". Nancy Tafuri's beautifully composed pictures, notable for their perspective and sensitive observation of animals, tell the story of a summer's day in a way which makes words unnecessary.

Peanut Butter and Jelly is a colourful, messy, rumbustious romp of a book in which people, dogs, cats and elephants let down their hair, their fur and their trunks in an uninhibited orgy of sandwich-making. The words are a variation of a play-rhyme about making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich - from kneading the bread dough, to mashing the peanuts and eating the result. Hand and body actions are suggested to accompany the rhymes, though the illustrations by Nadine Bernard Westcott are energetic enough - crammed with activity and humour with some extremely entertaining drawings of dancing elephants. For very young children, there is lots to point to, lots to name, and for older children there is a lesson to do with where foods come from. But above all this book is simply great fun.

Paul Galdone: *Cat Goes Fiddle-I-fee*. Heinemann, £5.95, 0 434 93945 6.
Judy Taylor and Reg Cartwright: *My Dog*. 0 7445 0776 6.

My Cat, 0 7445 0777 4. Walker, £4.95 each.
Anne Rockwell: *Come to Town*. Heinemann, £5.95, 0 434 95965 0.
William Hutton: *The Happy Digger*. Deutsch, £5.25, 0 233 98073 3.

Pamela Allen: *Mr McGee*. Hamish Hamilton, £6.95, 0 241 12055 1.
Nancy Tafuri: *Do Not Disturb*. Julia MacRae, £5.95, 0 86203 303 9.
Nadine Bernard Westcott: *Peanut Butter and Jelly*. Simon and Schuster, £3.95, 0 671 65519 1.

The Cry-By-Night

It's wind in the eaves, they'll tell you, mice
in the attic, old timbers stretching and
yawning...
It's no good. Hear it once, you're lost:
Miss

Nobody's weeping, somewhere. How
they hurt,
her hard jagged sobs. She is trying to pull
something up by the roots. Maybe her
heart?

Where is she? You must know. Down
quiet
corridors, up stairs, you follow listening
at every door, always closer, never quite

there. Where, you have to know. And
who?
And why do you feel nobody in this world
could comfort her but you? Because
somehow

you see her, in a waterfall of hair, as pale
and thin as moonshine, with a face as clear
in your mind as its own reflection in a
pool.

Is it for you she waits up, never sleeping,
Miss Wind-In-The-Eaves? No. Touch
her, she'd be
gone. She'd leave you nothing but the
weeping.

PHILIP GROSS

Iron Curtainland

A. L. Le Quesne

WILLIAM MAYNE
Tiger's Railway
186pp. Walker, £6.95.
07445 09029

William Mayne's *Tiger's Railway* is an elegant, economical and winningly light-hearted piece of writing: lighter than the succession of classic children's books with which he established his reputation thirty years ago, but as inventive and original as any of them. Tiger is a resourceful District Superintendent of the State railway system in an anonymous Balkan state: Romania is just over the bridge, Hungary and Bulgaria not far away. We are in Iron Curtain Wonderland, and Tiger's resource is direly needed: there is no shunting engine, the stationmaster is an apparition who makes secretive notes on all Tiger's doings, a Chinese engine appears in the sidings inhabited by an entire family of Chinese comrades who steal piglets and roast pork in the firebox, peremptory and menacing enquiries descend regularly from Headquarters about the train service on the line between Insk and Onsk - which was never built, but they can't be told that - and the threat of the salt mines is never far away. But all is well: Tiger has a solution for everything, sending the Chinese happily on their way, producing an antiquated royal train at the right moment to save the Chairman of the Party's itinerary from breakdown, and ending up firmly at the sunny end of the Headquarters building.

This is a bold claim to new territory for children's writing, at least for children's writing as light-hearted as this, and William Mayne carries it off triumphantly. The inherent dottiness of an economic organization in which everybody is engaged in passing on their problems to somebody else (like the milevolent Romanian shunting engine that comes mysteriously and unattended over the bridge one evening), and all that matters is to concoct satisfying replies to Headquarters' preposterous demands and not get found out, is neatly continued. It is Solzhenitsyn crossed with Lewis Carroll, though perhaps a bit too sweet for either - this is Iron Curtainland without the minefields and the barbed wire. True, there are the Black Trains, which it is best not to notice; but significantly, the Black Trains are a bit outside William Mayne's register, and he



Captain Hook, one of Jan Ormerod's illustrations to a new edition of Peter Pan (205pp. Viking Kestrel, £7.95, 0 670 80802 8).

also averts his gaze from them when it comes to it. In fact everyone is good-hearted and plays the system for laughs: the Chairman of the Party is bonhomie itself, and when the much-dreaded Inspector and Investigator finally arrive, it is to bring promotion to Tiger and even-handed justice to the Stationmaster, who himself has the grace to be ashamed of what he has been up to. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* are as yet unheard of, but Bessar District is a warmly human world nevertheless, where men get their deserts and all ends happily.

But it would be a harsh critic who cavilled at it. This is the work of a first-class children's writer enjoying himself a great deal, and there's really no sensible response but to share the enjoyment. It is a mixture of old tricks and new: on the one hand, his characters - especially the children - still talk in the same curiously quirky and elliptical fashion typical of all of them since the choirboys of *A Swarm in May*, on the other, Mayne reveals himself, for the first time as far as I know, as a fully-qualified railway buff replete with sound technical knowledge: his railway really works, down to the sights and the smells and the sounds of it and apart from the Vindobona Express, it is all steam.

Exemplary tourists

Tanya Harrod

CHRISTINA BJÖRK
Linnea in Monet's Garden
Illustrated by Lena Anderson
53pp. Sweden: Raben and Sjögren:
distributed in the UK by
Andover: Ragged Bears, £6.95.
91 29583144

When little Linnea returns to Sweden after her visit to Paris everyone asks: "How was the Eiffel Tower?" "Listen", she replies with spirit, "we had far more important things to see than that." This charming book tells the story of Linnea's love for flowers and of her touching friendship with her neighbour Mr Bloom, a retired gardener. Mr Bloom owns a copy of *Claire Joyes's Claude Monet: Life at Giverny* and the little girl and the old man become fascinated by the painter and by the beautiful water garden he created at Giverny in the 1890s. When they discover that Giverny has been restored and that it is now open to the public they set their hearts on a visit.

Because this story has some fairy-tale elements their dream comes true. But the details of their visit to Paris are wonderfully realistic - the Hotel Esmeralda, the bookshop down the street, the stray dogs, the train trip out to Giverny are all lovingly described. So too is the delicious picnic which Mr Bloom buys in the village and Linnea's first impressions of the garden itself. "It's funny with things you've thought about a lot and finally get to see. They almost always look different." When at last Mr Bloom and Linnea stand on the Japanese

bridge and look out over the lily garden it is a triumphant moment.

As serious students of Monet, neither Mr Bloom nor Linnea can resist a second visit to Giverny and they are rewarded by meeting Jean-Marie Toulgout, Monet's step-great-grandson. He explains what it was like to live with Monet. "He was born a lord" said his kinder and cosier friend Renoir. Jean-Marie gives an unidealized picture of Monet's autocratic ways with his large extended family. The sad story of his younger son Michel who wanted to be an inventor is bound to appeal to young readers, as are the family's skating and picnics and their frog-catching outings.

Back in Paris, Linnea and Mr Bloom visit the Musée Marmottan where they see "Impression, Sunrise" of 1872, the painting which led the critic Louis Leroy to derisively christen Monet and his friends "impressionists". They manage to get into the Lily Room at the Orangerie, although it is characteristically closed for repairs, and on their final morning they get up early to see the sun rise over the Seine and reflect on the series of paintings on that subject which Monet worked on in the summers of 1896 and 1897.

The book is charmingly illustrated in a scrapbook fashion with watercolour drawings by Lena Anderson, with the photographs supposedly taken by little Linnea in the garden, with a selection of Monet's paintings and with photographs of Monet and his family from the Toulgout collection at Giverny. Mr Bloom and Linnea could not be a nicer pair and it would be hard to think of a better introduction to Monet's paintings, to the egotism of great painters and to the lost art of exemplary

In defence of greatness

Michael Tanner

HANS KELLER
Criticism
160pp. Faber. Paperback, £4.95.
0 571 14803 4

Criticism is the second book of Hans Keller's to appear since his untimely death two years ago. It was written, he tells us more than once, during a three-week holiday in the Canaries in 1976, but he was too interested in other projects to see it through to press, though according to its editor Julian Hogg there was very little that needed to be done to the manuscript. Unlike the first of his posthumously published books, *The Great Haydn Quartet* (reviewed in the TLS of September 5, 1986), it proves to be a disappointment, manifesting many of Keller's vices and few of the virtues which made him so vital and indispensable a figure on the British musical scene for thirty years. It is repetitive, endlessly self-referential, latently under-organized though with a high degree of manifest organization, and has an intrinsically implausible central thesis which is argued for in a diffused and irritatingly ad hominem manner.

Keller would certainly have replied swiftly to the last charge, saying that the book is necessarily concerned with the crimes of particular critics, since they are exemplary of the foolishness inherent in musical (and other artistic) criticism. For he views criticism as a phoney profession, like being a opera player, a musicologist, a conductor or a viola player, a musicologist, a conductor or a viola producer among pseudo-musical activities, or like professional broadcasting, editing of articles, being a politician, psychoanalyst, psychiatrist or teacher among non-musical activities. On many of these subjects he has, as one would expect, penetrating and accurate delving observations, though few witty ones. The most tedious feature of the book is Keller's insistence on his peculiarity, the fundamental seriousness of his

jokes, when it is very hard to find any good ones; he always tended to overrate his sense of humour - and it isn't for him to tell us how funny he's being anyway (to use his favourite sentence-ending word). The book can be demonstrated to be strictly, scientifically and objectively (to use three more of his pet terms) an unwitting self-parody.

Keller's basic position about music criticism is not an unfamiliar one; it can be summarized as "Who needs it?" Composers certainly don't, at least of their own works; and listeners don't either, since it is up to them to listen as intelligently and initially uncritically as possible, in other words to hear as fully as they can what is on offer, and to keep quiet if they find nothing to enjoy. Keller is very much concerned with human destructiveness in many of its forms, and writes with moving anger about it, especially as it is directed towards greatness. He writes at length about the "Polycrates Complex", the need to diminish the great, and observes tellingly that "when you speak at the Oxford Union or the Cambridge Union, you are plunged into a smiling game about the past as never before - an exercise in that self-irony which seems to have lost not only ideals, but the very need for ideals". The high point of the book is a translation of a long review he wrote for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of Volume One of Cosima Wagner's *Diaries*, in which he attacks the almost universal urge to denigrate Wagner's character, and demonstrates how much blinder hate is than love. This seven-page passage would alone make the book worth buying.

But when Keller writes, "The fact is that the justification of criticism in its purest - evaluative - sense has never been seriously challenged", one wonders how he had managed to escape the innumerable questionings of precisely that justification which have been produced in the past half-century, not least by critics calling into question the validity of their own endeavours. True, the majority of serious debates about this central issue have been con-

ducted in academic circles, which Keller was at pains largely to ignore, and thereby saved himself a lot of time. But the fact remains that his own attack is disabblingly naive. For it essentially rests on the premise that what is insignificant in art doesn't matter in any way, and can therefore be simply disregarded. In the very long run this is probably true, but at any given time it is a matter of crucial importance to distinguish the genuinely creative - rare, and no doubt often outrageously abused because uncreative minds can't see it for what it is - from the bogus, the banal, and the merely pretentious. When at the very end of *Criticism* Keller writes that "the noblest critical achievements of my life were the moments when I decided to shut up, temporarily or, as in the case of most of the music of Debussy, Delius, and Stravinsky, for ever", one can applaud his recognition of some of his blind spots while feeling that, on the one hand, his tireless championing of Schoenberg constituted a still more noble succession of moments, and that on the other he was very well qualified to call trash by its name, and sometimes did so to startling and memorable effect - the mentioning of three great composers whose greatness he couldn't feel is a red herring. Who was in a better position to place the pretentious emptiness of Penderecki and Henze, or to dismiss witheringly the large quantities of sheer rubbish that have been perpetrated in the name of the avant-garde in the past forty years, often to anxious critical acclaim? The famous incident of Keller's in-

vention of a composer, Piotr Zak, and his performance of one of his works with Susan Bradshaw, which actually consisted in their randomly striking an array of percussion instruments in a BBC studio, was intended to show up the incompetence of applauding critics, though so far as I remember it was dismissed by almost everyone, and had to be mythologized by Keller subsequently to make his point. But his point was one concerning the prevalence of rubbish.

Life is short, art is long, even the great, even the greatest. So it is important that we should spend as little time as possible attempting to appreciate the inappreciable. Viewing the contemporary scene, there would be just as much reason for listing "The composer" and "The painter" as phoney professionals as many of those that Keller does list. He knew that, of course, but chose to deny it in order to do what he did so magnificently: to praise, to celebrate and help to understand the truly great. It is significant that nowhere here does he mention the "Hanslick Complex" - the tendency to praise everything just in case one should be caught out by the judgment of history. No doubt it is less important than the Polycrates Complex, as cowardice is usually less reprehensible than hatred. Good critics are very rare, even rarer than good artists. But that is no argument for the abolition of criticism, which not only needs the support of analysis, Keller's chosen field, but without which analysis itself would lose its point.

Grand exposition

Hugh Macdonald

BORIS DESCHLOEZER
Scriabin: Artist and mystic
Translated by Nicolas Slonimsky
333pp. Oxford University Press. £25.
0 193 33327 0

Scriabin regarded himself as both composer and philosopher, but while he committed his compositions to paper he confided his extraordinarily grandiose and egocentric views of the world only to his friends. He was evidently a fluent, ceaseless talker. Since he never listened to other people's music it is unlikely that he took much notice of other people's conversation either. Happily there were disciples, as such people always attract, and one of them, Boris de Schloezer, was a philosopher of high intelligence who took it upon himself, in the decade following Scriabin's untimely death in 1915, to rescue what he could of the legacy and promulgate ideas of which we would otherwise have little knowledge. De Schloezer had known Scriabin since 1902 (his sister Tatiana bore the composer three children); his first writings on him date from about 1907. In 1919, fleeing the revolution, he put together the present book, which was published in Russian in Berlin in 1923. It has been extensively drawn upon by later writers, almost always at second hand.

The famous *Mysterium*, which preoccupied Scriabin in the last years of his life, is scarcely mentioned in his correspondence; of its text he wrote only the poem for its "Preliminary Action"; of its music there remain four dozen pages of sketches in very rough state, mostly constructed for the purpose, and it was to involve, not to say transform, the entire human race: its conception was huge and unprecedented; its actualization clearly superhuman - impossible in fact. But de Schloezer never regarded it or its progenitor as mad. He devoted the bulk of his book to expounding it and its attendant philosophy with patience and insight.

One cannot help wondering how Scriabin, whose feeling for words set to music, as demonstrated by his First Symphony and a few song fragments, was so inept, and whose surviving literary fantasies are so short-winded and hallucinatory, can have philosophized with the learning and ratiocination here ascribed to him. In de Schloezer the philosopher perhaps creating sense out of nonsense? Was the whole crazy *Mysterium* dreamed up by Tatiana and Boris, and then passed on to Scriabin's gullible

mind? We shall never know how much of his own de Schloezer had to supply to lead Scriabin towards some meaningful systematic thought, but Scriabin: Artist and mystic has a tang of honesty which persuades us to accept de Schloezer's lucid, if wordy, exposition of a volatile mind. Scriabin's debts to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Madame Blavatsky and Hindu mysticism are carefully set forth. No one else could have done it with the same authority.

To have so vital a work available in Nicolas Slonimsky's excellent translation is a great blessing, although it will not interest those whose concern with Scriabin is exclusively musical. Some recent analyses might be about an entirely different human being, so far was Scriabin's world split between the actuality of composing and his fantasies of cosmic ecstasy, and so forth. The music is not much in evidence here, although the chapter "Scriabin the Artist" is admirable in a cultural context. The section on the *Mysterium* must be the most thorough study of an unwritten masterpiece in critical literature.

Two of de Schloezer's later essays on Scriabin are included in appendices, in one of which he acknowledges that the description of Scriabin as a "philosopher" must be taken *cum grano salis*. The astrological study by Scriabin's daughter Marina (who was of necessity much closer to her uncle Boris than to her father) as an additional preface, seems to my ear to convey nothing at all.

INFORMATION, PLEASE

Virginia Woolf: copies of any letters not included in the *Collected Letters* published in the 1970s; for an edition of the *Selected Letters*.

Joanne Trübmahn Banks.
7 S. Lakeshore Drive, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina 28745, USA.

Henry Dawe: location of two books by Dawe. *Games from the Old Masters* (Ackermann, 1833), and *Dave's Choice Selections for the Scribbler* ("published for the Proprietor and Mr Ackermann", 1834); also of George Stubbs. *Rymes & Lines on English Gothic Architecture* (London: 1863).

Christopher Lennox-Boyd.
The Great House, Burford, Oxfordshire.

Regulation 18A detainees: information about individuals detained during the Second World War under Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations; for a book.

A. W. Brian Shipman.
Darwin College, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NY.

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Savage, Charles C. *Architecture of the Private Streets of St Louis*. Columbia: Missouri UP. 236pp, illus. \$25. 0 8262 0485 6. 3/12/87.

Art

Colme, John *The Directory of Gold and Silvermiths: Jewellers and allied traders 1838-1914*, 2 vols. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club. 895pp, illus. £145. 0 90492 46 4.

Joyles, Rüdiger, and Bernard Smith *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, vol 3: *The Voyage of the "Resolution" and "Discovery"*, 1776-1780, 2 vols. Yale UP. 902pp, illus. £125/£200. 0 300 04105 5. 7/1/88.

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